

Strategic Genius: Securing Victory Outside the Battlefield

Стратегічний геній: забезпечення перемоги поза полем бою

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Purpose. To examine the “winning without fighting” strategy, its contemporary relevance, and its application in the Second Karabakh War.

Method. comparative analysis, and synthesis.

Findings. The concept of achieving victory without fighting is rooted in fundamental principles of strategy, emphasizing the attainment of objectives through intelligence, diplomacy, and other non-kinetic means, rather than direct armed conflict or large-scale warfare. This approach incorporates elements such as securing strategic and tactical superiority, leveraging economic power, forging alliances, exerting psychological influence, dominating the information domain, and demonstrating the futility of the opponent's resistance. While Sun Tzu's notion of “winning without fighting” originated in antiquity, it has gained renewed relevance in the complex and interconnected dynamics of the modern world. As highlighted in the article, the effective application of this strategy can minimize human casualties, economic costs, and social disruptions, while simultaneously enhancing a nation's image as strategically rational. Against this backdrop, the research explores the historical foundations, core principles, and practical applications of the “winning without fighting” strategy. To assess its applicability in today's rapidly evolving global environment, the article examines the essence of strategy, its contemporary definitions, its evolution, and its interconnection with the military domain. Finally, it analyses Azerbaijan's successes during the 44-day Second Karabakh War, identifying the pathways and instruments that contributed to the development and execution of a national “winning without fighting” approach.

Theoretical implications. This study expands the understanding of the “winning without fighting” concept by linking its classical foundations to contemporary strategic thought, demonstrating its adaptability to modern warfare, hybrid conflict, and information operations.

Practical implications. The findings offer guidance for policymakers and military strategists on applying non-kinetic means, such as diplomacy, information dominance, and psychological operations—to achieve strategic objectives while minimizing casualties, economic costs, and social disruption..

Value. This article contributes to strategic studies by bridging ancient military theory with modern conflict realities, offering both conceptual clarity and actionable insights for implementing “winning without fighting” in contemporary security contexts.

Paper type. Theoretical.

Мета дослідження. Дослідити стратегію “перемоги без бою”, її сучасну актуальність та застосування у Другій Карабаській війні.

Метод дослідження. Порівняльний аналіз та синтез.

Результати дослідження. Концепція досягнення перемоги без ведення бойових дій ґрунтується на фундаментальних принципах стратегії, що передбачають досягнення цілей за допомогою розвідки, дипломатії та інших некінетичних засобів, а не через пряме збройне протистояння чи масштабну війну. Такий підхід охоплює елементи здобуття стратегічної та тактичної переваги, використання економічної могутності, формування союзів, здійснення психологічного впливу, домінування в інформаційному просторі та демонстрацію марності опору противника. Хоча ідея Сунь-цзи про “перемогу без бою” виникла в давнину, вона набуває нової актуальності у складній і взаємопов'язаній системі сучасного світу. Як зазначено у статті, ефективне застосування цієї стратегії може мінімізувати людські втрати, економічні витрати та соціальні потрясіння, водночас підвищуючи імідж держави як стратегічно раціональної. У цьому контексті дослідження розкриває історичні основи, ключові принципи та практичні приклади реалізації стратегії “перемоги без бою”. Для оцінки її застосовності в умовах динамічного глобального середовища розглядаються сутність стратегії, її сучасні визначення, еволюція та зв'язок із військовою сферою. Нарешті, проаналізовано успіхи Азербайджану під час 44-денної Другої Карабаської війни, визначено механізми та інструменти, що сприяли формуванню і реалізації національної стратегії “перемоги без бою”.

Теоретична цінність дослідження. Це дослідження розширює розуміння концепції “перемоги без бою”, поєднуючи її класичні засади із сучасною стратегічною думкою, демонструючи її адаптивність до умов сучасної війни, гібридних конфліктів та інформаційних операцій.

Практична цінність дослідження. Результати дослідження можуть бути корисними для політиків і військових стратегів при застосуванні некінетичних засобів — таких як дипломатія, інформаційне домінування та психологічні операції — з метою досягнення стратегічних цілей при мінімізації людських, економічних та соціальних втрат.

Цінність дослідження. Стаття робить внесок у розвиток стратегічних досліджень, поєднуючи давню військовою теорію із сучасними реаліями конфліктів, пропонуючи як концептуальну ясність, так і практичні рекомендації щодо впровадження принципу “перемоги без бою” у сучасних безпекових контекстах.

Тип статті. Теоретична.

Key words: strategy, method, means, warfare, politics, peace, conflict, contradiction.

Ключові слова: стратегія, метод, засоби, ведення війни / воєнні дії, політика, мир, конфлікт, суперечність / протиріччя.

Introduction

From the day of the first recorded war in the world to the present day, many battles have been analyzed by various military historians and thinkers, and different strategies have been developed to achieve the objectives set in warfare. As new global risks emerge, the security domain expands to encompass unconventional security challenges, necessitating the rapid adaptation of traditional institutions by broadening their responsibilities, tasks, and, at times, the tools at their disposal (Nasirov et al., 2017). “The History of the Peloponnesian War” written by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides around 404 BC and “The Histories by Polybius” composed in 2nd century BC, can be regarded as some of the earliest scholarly works that analyze and illustrate the military strategies employed in the ancient world. In these writings, the strategies of annihilation and attrition were analyzed, and it was advised to avoid direct engagement with the enemy or large-scale battles that could lead to significant losses. The ancient Roman philosopher Marcus Cicero considered war to be the least desirable from the conflict. In his view, war should be undertaken only as a last resort and only when dialogue and negotiation have failed to produce a resolution. The Chinese military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu, who lived in the 6th century BC, also referred to war as an “armed struggle” and described it as “a matter of vital importance to the state” (Artur, 2007). Like Cicero, Sun Tzu considered resorting to violence through warfare as a measure to be taken only a last resort. In his view, achieving “a hundred victories in a hundred battles” does not constitute supreme skill, true mastery lies in subduing the enemy without fighting (John, 2020). According to Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini, who played a significant role in the development of the art of war in modern era, the true objective in warfare is not the outcome of individual battles, but the achievement of the overarching political goal. Clausewitz considered that, if the desired political objective is not achieved by the end of a war, then the victories gained on the battlefield are ultimately meaningless (Artur, 2007). The Italian diplomat and philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, who lived during the Renaissance period, also emphasized in his works – much like the Chinese thinker Sun Tzu – the advantage of achieving victory without fighting or through limited combat (Evans, 2014). Achieving victory without resorting to warfare not only reduces human casualties, economic burdens and social upheaval, but also enhances a country’s image from the perspective of strategic rationality. A national leader who attains strategic objectives through such means earns respect in the international community for their wisdom, composure and intelligence.

Thus, the strategy of “winning without fighting” or achieving political objectives through non-military means remains highly relevant in the modern world. This relevance is conditioned by the high intensity of conflicts and the mutual interdependence of relations in the contemporary international relations system. Nevertheless, despite the various advantage of this strategy, its implementation is accompanied by significant challenges and obstacles, arising from the inherent ambiguity and complexity of the “winning without fighting” approach. The aim of this research is to identify the ways to achieve desired outcomes without resorting to combat by examining the nature and specific characteristics of strategy, including military strategy. To achieve this goal, the article conducts a theoretical analysis of the concept of strategy, including its historical development, etymology and evolution, as well as the associated ideas and challenges, also examines definitions of military strategy adopted in several countries, explores the role and essence of strategy in achieving political objectives and through retrospective analysis, highlights its evolution and distinguishes it from tactics. In addition, based on the findings of both analyses, a general definition of military strategy was provided. Furthermore, discussions were held on the deterrence strategy and the successes achieved by Azerbaijan during the 44-day Second Karabakh War, highlighting the ways and means that shape a strategy leading to victory without combat or with minimal losses.

Results

Theoretical Analysis. An Overview of the concept of “Strategy”

It is advisable to clarify the general concept of “strategy” before analyzing the essence of military strategy. Analyses show that, there are many definitions of the “strategy” and there is no single, universally accepted explanation. Different concepts of strategy have been defined in various sectors such as economics, sports, politics and military. In the book on Strategy, written by the famous historians Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley, strategy is explained as follows: *“Strategy is a process that constantly adapts to changing conditions and circumstances in a world dominated by chance, uncertainly and opposition”* (Cavanaugh, 2016). The diversity of opinions about the concept of strategy indicates that, it has a sufficiently complex content. The etymological analyses show that, the word “Strategy” is of Greek origin and is related to the art of war. This concept, which originated from the ancient Greek word “strategos” initially meant “general” or the “person who commands the army” (Francisco, 2016). Innovations emerging gradually various sectors of society also changed the meaning of strategy over time. Initially related to a commander or their activities, the word “strategy” began to take on a broader meaning. As the scope of wars expanded, strategy among the ancient Greeks came to refer to the deployment and management of troops and military resources, whereas in the Byzantine era, it evolved into the art of skillfully employing and maneuvering forces. In the 6th century, the Byzantines, in addition to the concept of strategy, introduced the concept of tactics, which encompassed the methods and forms of employing troops in combat. Scholarly analyses indicate that both concepts remained integral to the art of warfare for up to nine centuries. The Prussian general and renowned military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, in his book *On War*, introduced a new and distinct approach to the concept of “strategy” and the components that constitute it. In this book Clausewitz described war as a continuation of state policy by other means. He believed that if the desired political outcome is not achieved at the end of a war, victories won on the battlefield are meaningless (Tahirov et al., 2023). Thus, Clausewitz, by presenting strategy as a means of achieving political objectives in a war, was the first to establish a direct link between strategy and politics. Following this, the concept of “strategy” began to be widely used not only in the military sphere but also in the realm of politics.

Under the influence of advances in science and technology, the significant transformations occurring in industry, education, social life and other sectors – as well as the need to effectively respond to these developments – have significantly expanded the scope and content of the concept of “strategy”. In the modern world strategies or strategic plans are developed across various sectors including “Education Strategy”, “Science Strategy”, “Business Strategy”, “Development Strategy” and “Cultural Strategy”. These strategic plans, tailored to the specific characteristics of each sector, outline development prospects, define the organization’s mission and objectives, establish time-bound targets, and provide the framework or approach for achieving the desired outcomes. Analyses show that the concept of strategy is sometimes conflated with related terms such as tactics, planning, vision, mission, objectives, priorities and targets. In some cases, the terms “strategy” and “plan” are used interchangeably. In our opinion, equating the concept of “strategy” with the aforementioned terms – including “plan” – undermines its fundamental nature and leads to an oversimplification of its true meaning. These are subcomponents, and the success of a strategy depends on their clear, precise, and consistent formulation and definition. Strategy is formed through the synthesis of insights derived from analysis of key components such as planning, vision, mission, objectives and priorities. In addition to the aforementioned components, it is crucial to accurately select the means, methods and approaches that enable the implementation of the strategy within available resources; to execute the planned sequence of actions consistently and to forecast the potential outcomes effectively. Analysis of events in the modern era shows that, strategic mistakes such as incorrect forecasting and the failure to define a common objective often

led to major conflicts and confrontations. For example, in Iraq and Libya certain Western states employed considerable resources and effective methods to overthrow Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, respectively. However, due to the lack of a clearly defined objective and a unified strategy for shaping the future of these countries, the outcomes were ultimately tragic. Presenting the overthrow of national leaders – who were merely intermediate (tactical) targets as the ultimate strategic objective was a fundamental mistake. Considering the complex religious and ethnic structures of both states, it would have been more appropriate in our view to define the establishment of a stable and legitimate government – one that could ensure the country's sustainable development, stability, unity and both internal and external security as the strategic objective.

Another critical issue in the formulation of strategy pertains to the clear definition of its duration or implementation timeframe. In the modern world strategic plans typically cover a period of 3 to 5 years. Considering the increasingly rapid pace of developments, it is reasonable to anticipate that this timeframe may be reduced to 2 to 4 years in the future. A well-formulated strategy incorporates a long-time perspective, determined by the organizations (be it a sector or a country) overarching objectives and its envisioned position or role in the future. In this context the characteristics of the environment in which the organization operates as well as the anticipated impact of internal and external factors, both in the present and in the future are taken into careful consideration.

Thus, strategy is a high-level document with broad scope and comprehensive coverage. It is a general approach or framework that outlines how the organization (or country) intends to achieve its anticipated long-term objectives. In the process of strategy formulation, the key questions addressed are: "Where are we now?" and "How do we get there?". In contrast to strategy – a plan is more narrowly defined and action-oriented. It provides detailed responses to questions such as "What is our current status?" and "What specific steps must be taken to reach a defined objective or desired state?". A roadmap that specifies the concrete actions (tasks) timelines and resources necessary for the effective implementation of the strategic plan. If we combine the information obtained because of the analysis, we can define the concept of "strategy" as follows:

Strategy is a comprehensive plan of action or system of coordinated measure aimed at achieving long-term or overarching objectives through the optimal management of intended outcomes, methods and resources, thereby guiding efforts in a desired and purposeful direction.

Retrospective Analysis: The evolution of military strategy from past to present

In the modern world the concept of military strategy is defined in numerous ways, shaped by diverse theoretical perspectives and practical considerations. While the core essence remains the same, its content varies from country to country. For example, In the book "The art of Strategy: A Guide to Effective Strategic Thinking" published by the Royal College of Defence Studies (2017) in the United Kingdom, military strategy is defined as "*the art or skill of achieving victory in war or accomplishing set objectives*". In the document titled "The national military strategy of the United States of America" published by the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff (2015), military strategy is described as "*the use of armed forces to protect national interest through the application or threat of forces*". According to the Russian literature (Great Russian Encyclopedia, 2022) military strategy is "*the highest form of the art of war, encompassing both the theory and practice of warfare, the preparation of the state's defense, the prevention of conflicts, the command and control of troops during wartime, and the determination of the scope of strategic operations*". In the people's republic of China, the term "military strategy" is officially defined as follows: "*The planning and management of all processes pertaining to the preparation for and conduct of war*". (Tianliang, 2022). Evidently, the substance of military strategy is shaped in accordance with the policy and overarching national strategy of the state that adopts it. Over the centuries, this concept has evolved under the influence

of technological advancements, transformations in the methods and forms of warfare, and innovations arising within political and social contexts, ultimately assuming its present form.

The concept of “strategy” originated in ancient times and was initially associated exclusively with the military sphere. Its emergence coincided with the formation of states and organized armed forces, and it was shaped by various factors, including the level of economic and social development, the introduction of new weapons and military technologies, the adoption of novel forms and methods of warfare, and accumulated combat experience. Changes in these factors influenced not only the nature of wars but also the content and components of strategy. In antiquity, wars were generally short in duration and limited in territorial scope. Over time, however, the duration and geographical scale of military operations expanded significantly, eventually encompassing multiple states. For instance, the Peloponnesian War, which began in 431 BC, lasted approximately twenty-seven years and involved numerous city-states across Greece, the Aegean Islands, the Asia Minor Peninsula, and adjacent regions (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025).

The increasing duration and scope of conflicts, the growing size and capability of military forces, and the repeated failure of peaceful conflict resolution compelled commanders and statesmen to deliberate on preparations for war and the methods of its conduct. The initial emergence of the concept of strategy in Ancient Greece arose from the necessities imposed by the realities and requirements of that era. From its inception, strategy became synonymous with the art of warfare and evolved into a principal instrument for safeguarding a state’s survival as an independent actor while securing favorable outcomes in conflicts. It continued to develop in response to the demands and challenges of successive periods. Transformations in science and technology, shifts in social structures, and changes in the international system have all shaped the concept of “strategy” and broadened the scope it encompasses. In the modern era, states rely not only on military power but also on a range of instruments and methods to achieve strategic objectives. Nevertheless, among the elements of national power, military power –together with its use and planning, as embodied in military strategy – continues to play a pivotal role in the effective implementation of state policy today. In our view, because military strategy confers effectiveness, legitimacy, and coherence upon military activities and operations in both peace and wartime, a comprehensive study of this concept enables a more systematic and informed approach to strengthening national security and defense capabilities.

The concept of “military strategy” has been revised and enhanced in accordance with advancements in the types of weapons and military equipment, their tactical and technical specifications, as well as the transformations in warfare. In ancient Greece, as well as in the Chinese and Roman Empires the basic concept of strategy which was closely associated with the art warfare remained largely unchanged for a long period of time. As noted with the emergence of the concept of “tactics” in the Byzantine Empire in the 6th century, there arose a need to clarify the definition of “strategy” as well. However, until the end of the 18th century, due the to the lack of a clear definition of strategy, the terms “strategy” and “tactics” were often used interchangeably in many contexts. It was the Prussian military officer and writer Dietrich Heinrich Freiherr von Bulow who first clearly articulated the distinction between these concepts. In his book “The New Tactics” he defined strategy and tactics as follows: “*Strategy is the science of military operations conducted beyond the horizon and the range of artillery fire, while tactics concerns operations carried out within those limits*” (Stoker, 2016). By presenting strategy and tactics as levels of warfare, Bulow defined their scope based on the range of the farthest - reaching artillery. From that point onward the concepts of military “strategy” and “tactics” began to be used separately and with distinct meanings. Since the concept of military strategy evolves in accordance with the nature of warfare, military technology, national characteristic, combat experience and political structure, it has varied across different historical periods and nations. The ideas expressed by Swiss military theorist Henri Jomini – one of the greatest military thinkers of the 9th century regarding military strategy and tactics made

a significant contribution to the conceptualization of strategy. Therefore, strategy forms the foundation of the art of war and represents the skill of conducting and managing warfare by encompassing all zones of military operations on the map. Tactics on the other hand, refers to the conduct of battle within a specific area and the deployment of forces in accordance with the characteristics of that terrain (Ami-Jacques, 2023). In addition, Jomini was the first to introduce the concept of “grand tactics”, which is now known in modern military art as the operational level of warfare. The ideas advanced by the renowned military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, who lived in the same era, played a pivotal role in shaping the art of war, particularly the concept of “military strategy”. In fact, both Clausewitz and Jomini developed their theories on strategy and warfare under the influence of the Napoleonic Wars. As an officer in the Prussian army, Clausewitz witnessed a conflict that began with a major defeat but eventually ended in victory. In contrast, Jomini, who served on Napoleon’s general staff, observed the rapid and spectacular victories at the outset of the war, which were ultimately followed by a devastating defeat and the capitulation of France. It was precisely the course of these events that led each of them to develop different ideas about strategy. In Clausewitz’s concept of “strategy” the ultimate outcome of the war was the main focus. In contrast, Jomini’s approach to strategy was based on operational elements such as movement, firepower and maneuver. At the beginning of war, Napoleon skillfully executed these operations and achieved great success against several countries. Nevertheless, his ambitions led to overextended supply lines, the exhaustion of his army, the breakdown of logistical support and ultimately the loss of effective command and control. Although Napoleon achieved remarkable victories at Austerlitz and Borodino during the war against the Austrian, Prussian and Russian Empires, France was ultimately defeated by the allied forces. For this reason, Clausewitz believed that if the desired political outcomes were not achieved at the end of war, victories on the battlefield were meaningless (Sterman, 2020). He was the first to link strategy with politics, famously describing strategy as the continuation of state policy by other namely, military means (Čajić, 2016). Through this approach, he introduced the concept of distinguishing between higher and lower levels of strategy. The higher level later came to be known as grand strategy, while the lower level became known as military strategy. Reference to Clausewitz’s ideas allows military strategy to be understood as the use of force (war) to achieve the objectives set forth in grand strategy or state policy. Like Jomini Clausewitz also divided military strategy into phases: the preparation for war and the execution of military operations. Preparation for war was guided by grand strategy, whereas military operations focused on the execution of battles on the battlefield. Although Clausewitz did not identify the intermediate level that Jomini referred to as “grand tactics,” he introduced key concepts such as the “culminating point” and the “center of gravity,” which continue to be employed today in the planning of military operations at the operational level. Thus, the ideas of both Jomini and Clausewitz had a significant impact on the development of the concept of “military strategy” and played a crucial role in shaping its modern form.

The First and Second World Wars had a substantial influence on the evolution and refinement of the concept of military strategy. These global conflicts represented a significant departure from previous wars in terms of their scale, the diversity and sophistication of weaponry and technology employed, the duration and tempo of combat operations, and the sheer number of nations and individuals involved. In those wars, the victorious states were those that succeeded in mobilizing all their resources for military purposes and were able to withstand the immense pressures of total war. Liddell Hart a prominent military theorist of his time who served as an officer in the British Army and witnessed both World Wars, defined military strategy as: “*the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy*” (Freedman, 2018). Having drawn conclusions from the devastation of the First World War, Liddell Hart maintained that effective military strategy is not achieved through direct engagement with enemy, but through indirect methods – striking at unexpected points or far from the main line of contact in order to

exhaust and destabilize the adversary over time. He supported his argument by emphasizing that an indirect strategy minimizes unnecessary losses and enables the conservation of military strength and material resources. Liddell Hart also stressed the importance of properly allocating forces and resources and concentrating them at critical points during decisive moments. An analysis of the Second World War demonstrates that Great Britain conducted its war effort largely in accordance with this strategic approach. Specifically, Great Britain avoided engaging in large scale battles on the main front with Adolf Hitler's Germany until the latter had reached its culminating point, instead prioritizing relatively limited military operations in peripheral theater such as North Africa and Cyprus. Such a strategy allowed for the preservation of resources to be used at decisive moments, while simultaneously enabling the gradual weakening of the enemy. Following the Second World War military strategy evolved under the influence of several key factors: the potential use of nuclear weapons, the emergence of aerospace technologies, the development of long range and precision guided weapons, and the national security doctrines adopted by the United States and Soviet Union in bipolar international system. In this era theoretical frameworks such as "limited war", "nuclear warfare" and "nuclear peace" played a significant role in shaping military strategy. In such a context, the objective of military strategy extended beyond merely winning battles and wars; it also encompassed maintaining readiness for war, ensuring peace and security, and shaping the broader geopolitical landscape. Since major nuclear armed powers were reluctant to engage in direct conflict with one another, they adopted a strategy of weakening their rivals indirectly by supporting proxy forces. This strategy, often referred to as a "proxy war," differs only slightly in essence from what Liddell Hart previously described as the strategy of the "indirect approach." Whereas Hart's "indirect approach" emphasized limited-scale military operations on the periphery of the enemy's position, proxy warfare highlights the significance of major powers conducting war not through direct engagement with one another, but through the use of third-party or surrogate forces (Ghantous, 2025). This strategic approach aims to impose substantial costs on the opposing side – economically, militarily, financially, politically, and in terms of human lives – while minimizing the direct exposure of one's own resources, particularly personnel, to high levels of risk. For example, During the United States intervention in Vietnam, the Soviet Union didn't participate directly in the war, but extended substantial support to North Vietnam through the supply of arms, military equipment and advisory personnel. According to official records, approximately 58,000 U.S. military personnel were killed and over 300,000 were wounded as a result of the Vietnam intervention. In addition, the United States lost a total of 3,699 combat aircraft and 4,865 helicopters due to combat and operational incidents. Although no official comprehensive studies on the total cost of the Vietnam conflict were conducted, the U.S. Statistical Center reported in 1974 that government expenditures had exceeded \$352 billion (Congressional Quarterly, 2024). The heavy losses and enormous cost led to growing social discontent, ultimately forcing the United States to withdraw from Vietnam. A similar situation occurred during the Soviet Union's military intervention in Afghanistan. Official figures indicate that more than 14,000 Soviet soldiers lost their lives during the conflict. However, it is claimed in unofficial sources that the actual number of casualties is significantly higher than the official figures (Mahammadi, 2017: 89). According to many analysts, the war in Afghanistan further deepened the existing crisis and accelerated the process of the Soviet Union's collapse.

Since 1990, military strategy has begun to evolve under the influence of revolutionary innovations in high-energy physics, nanotechnology and information and communication technologies, as well as their broad application in the military field. Unmanned aerial vehicles, artificial intelligence, high precision weapons and rapid information processing – all products of these technologies – have brought about fundamental changes in military strategy. Primarily due to the rapid development of information and communication technologies and their wide application in the military sphere, information warfare has come to the forefront in achieving a country's strategic objectives. Furthermore, the penetration of information and communication technologies

into the military sphere has led to the emergence of a new domain of confrontation – cyberspace. Many states have already incorporated military theories and concepts reflecting the characteristics of the information age into their military strategies: hybrid, cyber and network centric wars, cyberattacks, multi domain operations, and so on. In the modern world, the concept of strategy is used across different domains such as business, economics, and even everyday life. Nevertheless, in terms of ensuring a country's existence as an independent actor on the global stage and protecting its interests from potential threats, military preparedness – including military strategy – holds a special place in the life of the state. The generalization of the knowledge gained allows military strategy to be defined in broad terms as follows: as a component of overall strategy, military strategy is the art of skillfully planning and managing military actions, capabilities, and resources, as well as employing appropriate methods of deterrence and coercion, in order to support political objectives established during both peace and wartime and to achieve military goals.

Strategy that leads to victory without fighting: Historical experience

Modern wars, beyond the realm of military power, demand the comprehensive mobilization of a warring parties' economic, political, informational, and social resources, often culminating in extensive destruction and substantial loss of life. For these reasons, contemporary states tend to anchor their military strategies in the theory of deterrence – a doctrine that operates at a lower intensity than actual combat while enabling the attainment of political objectives. The theory of strategic deterrence was first articulated in 1947 by U.S. diplomat George F. Kennan in the context of countering the Soviet Union. Its primary purpose is to avert external threats to a state's sovereignty and vital interests. The underlying logic is to signal, through credible capabilities and unwavering resolve, that any attempt to undermine the state's core interests would be futile, and that provocative, escalatory, or aggressive actions would incur severe repercussions (Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2021). Professor Dmitri Trenin (2024), Scientific Director of the Institute of World Military Economy and Strategy at the National Research University of Russia, categorizes deterrence activities into three principal components: military, spatial, and diplomatic or coalition-based. An analysis of relevant literature from the United States, China, and Russia allows us to identify activities corresponding to these deterrence components. The military component encompasses the demonstration of advanced weapons, conducting military exercises, deploying troops and armaments in strategic locations, elevating combat readiness, executing limited military operations, and delivering preemptive strikes. The spatial component refers to the domains in which deterrence activities are carried out, including land, air, information, cyber, and space. Accordingly, warfare or confrontations in these domains are classified as land warfare, air warfare, information warfare, and so forth. In the 20th century, hybrid warfare—which involves large-scale hostile activities in the information and cyber domains – played a significant role in achieving strategic objectives, enabling a state to undermine an adversary internally without engaging in extensive military operations. Several academic studies in open-source literature have examined this issue, with a particular focus on the South Caucasus region (Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2020a; Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2020b; Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2020c). The diplomatic or coalition component focuses on isolating the adversary through strong alliances and formal diplomatic agreements. We contend that implementing these activities in a balanced manner, tailored to the circumstances and available capabilities, can effectively deter adversaries from aggressive actions and achieve strategic objectives without resorting to direct combat.

Deterrence is by no means a new concept and has long been a subject of interest for military strategists and thinkers throughout history. As noted, a “hot war” entails substantial losses in both human lives and material resources. Consequently, great commanders and strategists have often achieved their objectives not through direct use of force, but by employing deception and intimidation, thereby gaining strategic and tactical advantages and undermining the adversary's

fighting capability and will with minimal cost, loss, and risk. This approach, commonly referred to as “winning without fighting”, finds its roots in the ideas of ancient military thinkers and continues to retain relevance in the modern era. The ancient Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu, for instance, considered the resort to force in battle as a measure of last resort. In his view, achieving 'a hundred victories in a hundred battles' does not necessarily require exceptional skill; true mastery lies in subduing the enemy without engaging in combat (Marcus, 2021). Sun Tzu emphasized that defeating the enemy through careful organization, intelligence gathering, espionage, deception, and psychological warfare is often more effective than relying solely on military force. The optimal strategy, according to Sun Tzu, is to expose the enemy's weaknesses without direct confrontation and to create conditions that undermine the adversary by covertly or overtly influencing the mindset and behavior of its population. The ultimate objective is to manipulate the situation in such a way that the enemy is left with no viable option but to surrender.

Although formulated in ancient times, Sun Tzu's strategy of “winning without fighting” remains highly relevant in the complex and interconnected landscape of modern warfare. Its enduring applicability stems from the fact that contemporary armed conflicts are significantly more destructive and resource-intensive than earlier forms of warfare. Analytical studies indicate that success in such conflicts is achieved not merely through direct combat, but primarily through the execution of carefully designed strategies and the effective exercise of influence. Today, the core of the “winning without fighting” approach is embodied in influence mechanisms such as information warfare, cyberattacks, and media manipulation, which enable actors in the information age to shape public opinion and undermine an adversary's capacity to respond by controlling narratives.

Throughout history, instances of achieving “victory without resorting to battle” or “through limited combat” have been exceedingly rare. This rarity is due to the inherent risks of such strategies, which require a comprehensive, multidimensional approach and highly effective leadership. In the modern era, a prominent example of this approach can be observed in the outcomes of the Second Karabakh War. On September 27, in response to yet another provocation of Armenian forces in Karabakh, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan launched a counter-offensive operation. There are a considerable number of scholarly papers and analytical reports available in open sources that examine the details of this war, including its historical background, operational developments, strategic implications, and broader geopolitical consequences (Guner et al., 2022; Iskandarov et al., 2022; Hasan et al., 2024). During the 44-day war, Azerbaijan secured a decisive victory by inflicting overwhelming defeats on Armenia, which had occupied the territories for nearly three decades. This outcome was facilitated by Azerbaijan's strategic and tactical superiority. Since 1993, under the leadership of National Leader Heydar Aliyev and later his political successor Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan has made significant strides in building and strengthening its armed forces, consolidating its economy, enhancing diplomatic relations, and fostering conditions for internal stability and comprehensive development. As a result, Azerbaijan gained a strategic advantage over Armenia in terms of human resources, mobilization capacity, military and economic strength, and diplomatic leverage. Furthermore, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan attained tactical superiority by deploying advanced, modern weaponry and military technology, gaining practical experience through exercises under real combat conditions, and mastering contemporary methods and forms of warfare. It was precisely due to this strategic and tactical superiority that the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan defied the forecasts of numerous international military experts, swiftly breached the enemy's defenses, advanced tens of kilometers into its depth, and liberated strategically significant territories, including the city of Shusha. Indeed, the counter-offensive was conducted in areas characterized by difficult terrain and robust fortifications, leading many experts to predict a protracted conflict with higher Azerbaijani casualties. Analyses suggested that breaching the extensive fortification systems constructed by the Armenian Army over three decades would be virtually impossible and that Azerbaijan would be unable to counter the large stockpiles of weapons

and military equipment illegally transferred to and deployed across the occupied territories. These predictions, however, failed to account for Azerbaijan's qualitative advantages in strategic and tactical capabilities. Despite Armenia's extensive, illicitly acquired arsenal, a marked asymmetry favored Azerbaijan in terms of military capacity and operational effectiveness. Military literature emphasizes that when opposing forces are roughly balanced, conflicts tend to be prolonged. Azerbaijan, however, shifted this balance not by sheer numbers, but by enhancing the qualitative aspects of its military power. Meanwhile, the Armenian forces, confident in their accumulated arsenal, had anticipated achieving absolute victory over Azerbaijan – a miscalculation that proved decisive. However, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan effectively neutralized much of the Armenian concealed military equipment, destroying the majority of the hardware deployed on the battlefield and capturing portions as war trophies. Over the course of the war, approximately 1,500 enemy air defense systems, artillery units, armored vehicles, and other military assets were eliminated. (Piriyev et al, 2022: 52). In this war, Azerbaijan's military potential enabled the achievement of maximum results, namely, victory, while incurring minimal losses. In conventional warfare, the attacking force typically mobilizes troops at a ratio of approximately three to one against the defender. However, the Azerbaijani Army, often maintaining a roughly 1:1 force ratio and at times confronting numerically superior enemy forces, successfully breached Armenian defenses and penetrated deep into their lines. In terms of personnel losses, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan suffered casualties that were four to five times lower than those incurred by Armenia.

Consequently, realizing that no viable options remained, the Armenian leadership accepted Azerbaijan's demands and, on November 10, signed a statement on the complete cessation of military operations. By signing this statement, Armenia effectively capitulated, thereby unequivocally acknowledging Azerbaijan's victory, as the agreement fully enshrined Azerbaijan's demands and interests. In accordance with the directives of the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan not only retained all liberated territories but also provided the Armenian leadership with a detailed schedule specifying concrete deadlines for the withdrawal of occupying forces from the Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin districts. By acceding to these conditions, the Armenian leadership avoided total defeat. As Pashinyan himself later acknowledged, had hostilities continued, an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Armenian soldiers would have been annihilated on the battlefield (Piriyev et al., 2022: 112).

The liberation of Lachin, Kalbajar, and Aghdam – territories that had been under occupation for 30 years and fortified with extensive engineering works – without a single shot being fired constitutes a major strategic achievement and represents one of the clearest examples of victory without direct combat. This success was secured not only through meticulously planned and effectively executed military operations but also thanks to robust diplomacy, resolute political will, sustainable economic development, and a comprehensive information campaign. The primary factors that enabled Azerbaijan to liberate these three districts without armed conflict are as follows:

– **Robust, highly trained and well – equipped Armed Forces.** The sustained enhancement of military preparedness and training, combined with meticulous planning of combat operations and the effective utilization of modern warfare technologies, afforded the Azerbaijani Armed Forces both strategic and tactical advantages. By deploying high-precision weaponry, unmanned aerial vehicles, and drone technologies – and integrating them effectively into operations while employing unconventional methods of warfare – the Azerbaijani forces executed a rapid counter-offensive that disoriented and destabilized Armenian troops. As a result, Armenia had no option but to cease resistance and unconditionally accept the terms dictated by Azerbaijan.

– **The implementation of effective strategic communication policies.** Azerbaijan's strategic use of modern communication tools, including social media platforms, carefully crafted

narratives, and proactive international diplomacy played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion both domestically and globally, fostering national unity, and ultimately securing victory in alignment with its political and military objectives. Conversely, internal discord, media restrictions, and the ineffective utilization of digital platforms undermined Armenia's strategic efforts.

– **The successful conduct of information warfare operations.** From the outset of the counter-offensive launched on September 27 and throughout the entire war, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, demonstrated exceptional leadership and diplomatic acumen in disseminating accurate information, countering disinformation, and defending the country's legitimate position on the international stage. In nearly 30 interviews with foreign media outlets in Turkish, Russian, and English, he provided the international community with comprehensive insights into Azerbaijan, the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh conflict", the extent of Armenian occupation, Armenia's false claims and war crimes, acts of violence against civilians, and the necessity of the counter-offensive operations.

– **The successful attainment of international political and diplomatic support.** Azerbaijan's ability to clearly communicate its position to the international community, both at the outset and throughout the war, as well as to secure support from major global powers, played a crucial role in achieving victory. President Ilham Aliyev, undertook significant diplomatic measures to strengthen Azerbaijan's international standing and to legitimize the liberation of its occupied territories. Despite the influence of a strong Armenian diaspora in countries such as the United States, France, and Russia, Armenia's efforts to legitimize the puppet regime established in the occupied territories ultimately failed. In contrast, Azerbaijan's success in securing political backing from major powers – including Turkey, Russia, Israel, and Pakistan – further consolidated its position.

Consequently, the armed conflict initiated on September 27, 2020, following provocations by Armenia, lasted 44 days and culminated in a decisive victory for Azerbaijan. During this period, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces inflicted severe losses on the Armenian military and liberated a substantial portion of the occupied territories, including the strategically significant city of Shusha. Constrained by military, economic, and diplomatic pressures, Armenia accepted Azerbaijan's demands and, on November 10, signed the trilateral statement, effectively constituting an act of capitulation. Recognizing its weakened position, Armenia was compelled to surrender parts of Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin without armed conflict. The restoration of these territories without military engagement represents a major strategic achievement for Azerbaijan. Its significance was underscored by President Ilham Aliyev, who stated: *"Taking into account the winter season and the difficult terrain, we could have incurred significant casualties and would have required considerable time. Therefore, our victory is a historic victory"* (president.az, 2020). The liberation of Aghdam, Lachin, and Kalbajar without firing a single shot saved the lives of thousands of young Azerbaijani soldiers. While the Azerbaijani Army would have eventually liberated these regions through battlefield operations, the number of casualties would have been substantially higher.

Conclusion

Strategy, whether military or otherwise, entails a series of successive measures aimed at enhancing efficiency and effectiveness under uncertain and volatile conditions. Its proper formulation and implementation strengthen state security and resilience against threats, and because strategy is inherently dynamic, it requires continuous adaptation, learning from mistakes, and responding to environmental changes. In the modern world, developing an effective strategy demands a holistic, adaptive, and future-oriented approach, moving beyond traditional top-down methods toward iterative processes that embrace continuous improvement. Military strategy, as an integral component of national security, preparedness, and warfare, remains guided by principles such as

concentrating forces, assessing strengths and vulnerabilities, adapting to evolving circumstances, and aligning political and military objectives. The discipline continually evolves under the influence of historical lessons, technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, and transformations in the character of warfare, including the emergence of asymmetric, hybrid, and information-based conflicts. Scientific and technological progress – ranging from artificial intelligence and high-precision weaponry to autonomous systems and advanced command and surveillance platforms – has expanded the scope of strategy, requiring consideration of new methods, forms of warfare, and virtual battlespaces. Throughout history, the most successful leaders and strategists have achieved objectives not solely through force, but by employing deception, information warfare, diplomacy, and minimizing armed confrontations to reduce casualties, with true success defined as attaining strategic goals with minimal losses. The 44-day Second Karabakh War exemplifies this approach: through exceptional strategic and diplomatic leadership, Azerbaijan effectively combined military preparedness, diplomacy, information operations, and strategic communication to achieve all its objectives. Most notably, by compelling the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin without direct combat, Azerbaijan presented one of the most striking contemporary examples of the “victory without fighting” strategy, underscoring the enduring importance of adaptive, integrated, and innovative strategic thinking in modern conflict.

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