

Toward the Concept of Psychological Control: Understanding Strategy as an Exercise in Emotion Regulation

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ABSTRACT

Control is a well-established concept in strategic studies. Unlike its physical counterpart, the psychological aspect of control has received little scrutiny. The article uses emotion research to conceptualize psychological control. Psychological control stands for a strategically elicited emotional feeling of relational weakness that motivates abstinence from hostile actions. Strategists can achieve psychological control by transforming physical situations through offence, defence or their combination. The process of emotion regulation is affected by the psychological characteristics and actions of the adversary as well as by the character of warfare in any given context. In constructing this theoretical analysis, the article relies on the literature on emotion sciences, strategic theory and strategic history. The argument contributes to several ongoing discussions in strategic studies and it can inform strategic practice.

Keywords: Control, psychology, emotions, violence, strategy

Προσεγγίζοντας την Έννοια του Ψυχολογικού Ελέγχου: Η Στρατηγική ως Άσκηση Συναισθηματικής Ρύθμισης

ΣΥΝΟΨΗ

Ο έλεγχος είναι μια καθιερωμένη έννοια στις στρατηγικές σπουδές. Σε αντίθεση με το φυσικό του ισοδύναμο, η ψυχολογική πτυχή του ελέγχου έχει λάβει ελάχιστη προσοχή. Το άρθρο χρησιμοποιεί τη συναισθηματική έρευνα για να συλλάβει εννοιολογικά τον ψυχολογικό έλεγχο. Ο ψυχολογικός έλεγχος αναφέρεται στη στρατηγική πρόκληση ενός αισθήματος σχετικής αδυναμίας που ωθεί προς την αποχή ανάληψης εχθρικών ενεργειών. Οι στρατηγιστές μπορούν να επιτύχουν τον ψυχολογικό έλεγχο μετουσιώνοντας την πραγματικότητα του φυσικού ελέγχου μέσω της επίθεσης, της άμυνας ή ενός συνδυασμού αυτών των δύο. Η διαδικασία της συναισθηματικής ρύθμισης επηρεάζεται από τα ψυχολογικά χαρακτηριστικά και τις ενέργειες του αντιπάλου καθώς και από τον χαρακτήρα του πολέμου στο δεδομένο ιστορικό πλαίσιο. Για την εκπόνηση αυτής της θεωρητικής ανάλυσης, το άρθρο βασίζεται στη βιβλιογραφία των συναισθηματικών επιστημών, της στρατηγικής θεωρίας και της στρατηγικής ιστορίας. Το επιχείρημα του άρθρου έρχεται να προστεθεί σε αρκετές συζητήσεις που συνεχίζονται να διεξάγονται στις στρατηγικές σπουδές και μπορεί να συμβάλει στη στρατηγική πρακτική.

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Introduction

Control is a well-established concept in strategic studies. The so-called controlling school of strategy emerged more than a century ago with Alfred Mahan and Julian Corbett's writings.¹ In the subsequent decades, the notion of control as a unifying purpose of strategic practice was repeatedly echoed by other naval and maritime strategists such as Herbert Rosinski, Henry Eccles and most famously rear admiral Joseph Wylie.² Recently, strategic theorists Milan Vego, Lukas Milevski and John Klein have further advanced our understanding of control and its character in different domains of contemporary warfare.³ Meanwhile, control has also become a core concept in military doctrines dealing with naval and maritime security.⁴ Although there are differences among conceptualizations of control, most theorists agree that control conveys restriction of the adversary's freedom of action by limiting the options at the latter's disposal.

Control can occur in two forms: physical and psychological. Physical control conveys the restriction of the adversary's freedom of action by blocking the latter's options through military force. The psychological form of control has received considerably less attention and subsequently it remains unclear what exactly the concept stands for. Wylie, the only theorist who has dealt with the concept at greater length, equalled psychological control to influence which can be produced by all forms of power, including non-military ones.⁵ Such a conceptualization of psychological control renders the concept redundant for it is tantamount to the existing concepts, not only of influence but also power. It follows that if psychological control is to be a stand-alone concept it should be defined more narrowly. I propose this is best achieved when its conceptual content mirrors its physical counterpart. Thus, psychological control results from the use of military power and makes the adversary feel and think his options are restricted. In other words, psychological control is the psychological effect of violent action.

Accordingly, this article develops a new, emotion-centric conceptualization of psychological control. In terms of its conceptual content, psychological control is a

¹ Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London, 1911); John B. Hattendorf, 'Alfred Thayer Mahan and His Strategic Thought', in *Maritime Strategy and the Balance of Power: Britain and America in the Twentieth Century*, ed. John B. Hattendorf and Robert S. Jordan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 83–94.

² Herbert Rosinski, *The Development of Naval Thought* (New Port: Naval War College Press., 1977); Scott A. Boorman, 'Fundamentals of Strategy—The Legacy of Henry Eccles', *Naval War College Review* 62, no. 2 (2009); Joseph Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Control* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1967).

³ Lukas Milevski, 'Revisiting J.C. Wylie's Dichotomy of Strategy: The Effects of Sequential and Cumulative Patterns of Operations', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 2 (January 2012): 223–42; Lukas Milevski, 'Fortissimus Inter Pares: The Utility of Landpower in Grand Strategy', *Parameters* 42, no. 2 (2012): 6–15; John Klein, *Understanding Space Strategy: The Art of War in Space* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Control: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁴ The Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 'UK Maritime Power', Joint Doctrine Publication 0-10 (Shrivenham: Ministry of Defence, 2017); 'UK Air and Space Doctrine' (Shrivenham: DCDC, 2013), http://www.defencesynergia.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/jdp_0_30_uk_air_and_space_doctrine.pdf; Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, 'Australia's Maritime Strategy' (Canberra: The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, June 2004); Brazilian Government, 'National Strategy of Defence' (Brasilia: Ministry of Defence, 2008).

⁵ Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Control*, 87–91.



strategically stimulated emotional feeling of relational weakness that motivates abstinence from hostile actions. The feeling is strategically stimulated because it is the product of strategic practice – it is a deliberate or an accidental effect produced through military power. The feeling of weakness stems from the emotions characterized by the appraisals of low control over the situation, emotions such as fear, sadness or surprise. Once experienced, the emotions affect the adversary's cognition and behaviour and shape the latter's willingness to exploit particular courses of hostile actions. Absolute psychological control leads the adversary to surrender, while lesser degrees of control make him abstain from the use of force in specific domains or from the employment of specific tactics. Psychological control understood in this way restricts the adversary's options by making the latter feel unwilling to pursue particular courses of action.

Since psychological control is an emotional feeling, strategists can produce it through emotional regulation. Emotion regulation refers to a process through which an actor can change the character and the intensity of emotions.⁶ In strategic practice, emotion regulation for psychological control conveys violently transforming situations so that the adversary feels low control over them. Strategists can generate low control appraisals by selecting or modifying situations through offence, defence or their combination. Offence can produce these appraisals by selecting the time and the place of attacks. Defence may produce the same appraisals by modifying the situation through positional advantage, by the launch of counterattacks, or by bringing about reinforcements. If the transformation of the situation relates to the objectives that the adversaries care about, the latter may experience the desired emotions and be psychologically controlled. In these ways, strategists can achieve psychological control over their adversaries through the exercise of violent emotion regulation.

In constructing this theoretical analysis, the article relies on the literature on emotion sciences, strategic theory and strategic history. In terms of emotions, the paper focuses on theoretical works and experimental studies rooted in the appraisal theory of emotions and on the emerging literature on emotion regulation. The appraisal theory, essentials of which are explained in the next section, has been proven time and again to be a suitable tool to study phenomena in social sciences.⁷ It is also particularly well-suited for the purposes of this paper, because the theory considers control to be one of the determining dimensions through which people appraise the world. As such, the control dimension plays a crucial role in both emotional elicitation and emotional experience. To theorize ways in which strategists can manipulate the emotions of their adversaries, I combine practical observations derived from the literature on emotion regulation with the classical writings from strategic theory. The literature on emotion regulation fits this research because it allows for constructing a theoretically grounded relationship between physical actions and emotional effects. Throughout the analysis, I use examples from strategic history to illustrate the theoretical observations.

⁶ James J. Gross, 'Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects, *Psychological Inquiry*', *International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory* 26, no. 1 (2015): 1–26.

⁷ Stephane Baele, Olivier Sterck, and Elisabeth Meur, 'Theorizing and Measuring Emotions in Conflict: The Case of the 2011 Palestinian Statehood', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 4 (September 2014): 718–47; Eran Halperin, *Emotions in Conflict: Inhibitors and Facilitators of Peace Making* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Robin Markwica, *Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).



This article contributes to three distinct ongoing debates in strategic studies and related disciplines. First, this argument ties back to the discussion about the relationship of control to denial (of control). Scholars and professionals have repeatedly emphasized that the distinction between the two concepts may become blurred both in theory and in practice, pointing out that exercising control conveys at the same time denying it to the adversary.⁸ This article further problematizes the relationship by showing that the denial of control in the physical realm can produce psychological control, if the adversary appraises the situation as their loss of control. Hence, the article establishes an exact condition under which physical denial transforms into psychological control.

Second, this article contributes to the ongoing discussions about the psychological aspects of military defeat. Previous scholarship has explored how the very ideas of victory and defeat tend to be socially constructed.⁹ The most recent contribution to this tradition and the one that closely relates to psychological control is the concept of 'abstract defeat' introduced and conceptualized by Quintin van Zyl. Van Zyl argues that abstract defeat is "the unpleasant, transient psychological state that the combatant enters into, upon the development of the perception that a significant discrepancy exists between his desired future and an emerging reality, along with a perception of a diminished capacity for the correction thereof, on condition that he is the first participant to do so."¹⁰ This concept resembles psychological control; both are associated with unpleasant emotional experience, and with the appraisal of low control over the situation.¹¹ However, the two concepts also differ in important aspects. For one, psychological control is stimulated by adversaries physical actions, whereas abstract defeat manifests independently of the adversary's physical actions.¹² Abstract defeat is also narrow in its content, being "but the evolutionary sophistication of primordial flight,"¹³ whereas psychological control covers more emotions and subsequently more cognitive and behavioural tendencies than flight alone. Furthermore, psychological control is also broader content-wise because it is about the restriction of options whereas abstract defeat is about the collapse of the adversary's morale, which is only equivalent to psychological control in the latter's absolute form. Finally, Van Zyl himself admits that his argument requires leaps of faith because he relies on studies conducted on non-human species to make his main points. In contrast, my conceptualization of psychological control requires no such leaps because I rely on emotion studies conducted on human subjects. Therefore, psychological control is a useful standalone concept while also closely related to other concepts associated with the adversary's defeat.

Finally, this article contributes to the ongoing emotional turn in fields and disciplines preoccupied with the study of war. Despite Thucydides and Clausewitz's fertile legacy, modern scholarship on strategy has seldom treated emotions with due respect. More

⁸ Bleddyn E. Bowen, *War in Space Strategy, Spacepower, Geopolitics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Milevski, 'Fortissimus Inter Pares: The Utility of Landpower in Grand Strategy'; Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Denial: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁹ Dominik D. P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Quentin Van Zyl, 'Shaping Defeat An Inquiry into the Mind of the Vanquished' (Doctoral Thesis, London, King's College, 2020), 41.

¹¹ Ibid., 40–41.

¹² Ibid., 41.

¹³ Ibid., 51.



often, emotions were considered an inherently human but somewhat mysterious impediment to rational decision-making. This has only changed in the last few years as several promising forays paved the way for a potential 'emotional turn' in the field.¹⁴ The field of international relations already experienced this phenomenon two decades ago, and the emotional perspective has been flourishing there ever since.¹⁵ Meanwhile, emotions and their regulation have also become a mainstream research topic in peace and conflict studies.¹⁶ This paper seeks to contribute to the strategic studies literature in particular but the insights may be relevant to the students of other disciplines as well.

The article proceeds in the following way. The first section explores psychological control as a feeling on the side of the adversary. The second section shows how strategists can produce this effect using violence in the physical world. The third section discusses the factors that may amplify or hinder the emotion regulation process and psychological control achievement. The concluding section summarises the findings and discusses their implications.

Psychological control in the mind of the adversary

This section explains what emotions are, how they come to existence, how they orchestrate the processes across organism to produce psychological control and how all this relates to the adversary's will to fight. Emotions are "complex, organized subsystems consisting of thoughts, beliefs, motives, meanings, subjective bodily experiences, and physiological states."¹⁷ They constitute the mechanism that synchronizes the processes across organisms to respond to stimuli that matter for our concerns, survival and well-being.¹⁸ In doing so, emotions affect our perception, direct our attention, colour our

¹⁴ Lukas Milevski, 'Battle and Its Emotive Effects in War Termination' (Changing Character of War Conference, Oxford, 2019); Kenneth Payne, *Strategy, Evolution, and War* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2018); Kenneth Payne, *The Psychology of Strategy: Exploring Rationality in the Vietnam War* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015); Michael Rainsborough, 'Politics and Passion: The Neglected Mainspring of War', *Infinity Journal* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 32–36; Samuel Zilincik, 'Strategy and the Instrumental Role of Emotions', *Strategy Bridge* (blog), 25 September 2018, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2018/9/25/strategy-and-the-instrumental-role-of-emotions>.

¹⁵ Yohan Ariffin, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Vesselin Popovski, eds., *Emotions in International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Neta Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships', *International Security* 24, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 116–56; Neta Crawford, 'Human Nature and World Politics: Rethinking "Man"', *International Relations* 23, no. 2 (June 2009): 280–82; Neta Crawford, 'Emotions and International Security: Cave! Hic Libido', *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 1 (June 2013): 121–23; Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (London: Cornell University Press, 2015); Markwica, *Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy*; Rose McDermott, Antony C Lopez, and Peter K. Hatemii, "'Blunt Not the Heart, Enrage It": The Psychology of Revenge and Deterrence', *Psychology of War* 1, no. 1 (December 2017): 68–88; Jonathan Mercer, 'Emotional Beliefs', *International Organization* 64, no. 1 (January 2010): 1–31; Jonathan Mercer, 'Emotion and Strategy in the Korean War', *International Theory* 67, no. 2 (April 2013): 221–52.

¹⁶ Halperin, *Emotions in Conflict: Inhibitors and Facilitators of Peace Making*.

¹⁷ Richard Lazarus, 'Relational Meaning and Discrete Emotions', in *Appraisal Process in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, ed. Klaus Scherer, Angela Schorr, and Tom Johnstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67.

¹⁸ Tobias Brosch, Gilles Pourtois, and David Sander, 'The Perception and Categorisation of Emotional Stimuli: A Review', *Cognition and Emotion* 24, no. 3 (2010): 377–400; Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, 'Evolutionary



judgment, influence our thoughts' content and breadth, shape our memory, and modify our behaviour.¹⁹ Emotions are inherently complex phenomena. By their nature, they are likely to proliferate and be particularly intense in strategic practice, where the prospect of harm and death so often contests people's survival and well-being.

The appraisal theory provides an elegant explanation for how emotions emerge.²⁰ Emotions come into existence as a consequence of one's subjective interpretation (appraisal) of events rather than as a direct response to the events themselves.²¹ People tend to interpret situations across a set of appraisal dimensions.²² The classic study by Smith and Ellsworth, for example, argues that one can interpret the world along the dimensions such as attention, novelty, certainty, control, pleasantness, perceived obstacle, responsibility and legitimacy, and anticipated effort.²³ Combinations of interpretations across these dimensions can produce a wide array of different emotions.²⁴ Emotions thus emerge as a consequence of situations that are deemed relevant to one's survival or well-being but their particular character depends on the mix of appraisals. Interestingly, once elicited, emotions tend to enhance the same appraisals that gave rise to them in the first place.²⁵ This quality of emotional experience is essential to psychological control because it means that emotions have the inherent tendency to propagate themselves by eliciting similar appraisals.

The appraisal dimension of control is salient to psychological control as it represents the adversary's estimation of his own power to cope with the situation. Control can be ascribed to three distinct agencies. These are the subjects themselves, some other entities, and the environment.²⁶ For the sake of simplicity, this paper will only focus on the amount of control the subjects (the adversaries) ascribe to themselves. Thus, when speaking about low control appraisal, I mean that the adversary feels relative inferiority in control (he or she sees the other entity or the environment to be in control). The appraisal of high control refers to situations when the adversary feels relative superiority of control over the situation.²⁷ The appraisals of high control lead to emotions such as anger, pride or happiness, which further enhance the confidence of the adversary to cope with the situation.²⁸ As such, the appraisals of high control can never lead to the achievement of

Psychology and the Emotions', in *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), 91–115.

¹⁹ Jennifer Lerner et al., 'Emotion and Decision Making', *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (January 2015): 799–823.

²⁰ For the overview of the major emotions theories, see Géraldine Coppin and David Sander, 'Theoretical Approaches to Emotion and Its Measurement', in *Emotion Measurement*, ed. Meiserlam L. Herbert (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2016), 1–22.

²¹ Ira Roseman and Craig Smith, 'Appraisal Theory', in *Appraisal Process in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

²² Agnes Moors et al., 'Appraisal Theories of Emotion: State of the Art and Future Development', *Emotion Review* 5, no. 2 (March 2013): 120.

²³ Craig Smith and Phoebe Ellsworth, 'Patterns of Cognitive Appraisal in Emotion', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48, no. 4 (April 1985): 813–38.

²⁴ Moors et al., 'Appraisal Theories of Emotion: State of the Art and Future Development', 122.

²⁵ Jennifer Lerner and Dacher Keltner, 'Beyond Valence: Toward a Model of Emotion-Specific Influences on Judgement and Choice', *Cognition and Emotion* 14, no. 4 (2000): 473–93.

²⁶ Smith and Ellsworth, 'Patterns of Cognitive Appraisal in Emotion'.

²⁷ Ira Roseman, 'Appraisal Determinants of Emotions: Constructing a More Accurate and Comprehensive Theory', *Cognition and Emotion* 10, no. 3 (August 2010): 262.

²⁸ Smith and Ellsworth, 'Patterns of Cognitive Appraisal in Emotion'.



psychological control.²⁹ The appraisals of low control are necessary for the achievement of psychological control because they negatively alter the adversary's sense to cope with the situation.

Psychological control emerges when the low control appraisals turn into emotional experience. "Cold" estimations of strength or weakness alone are not enough to motivate human action (or inaction), but emotions are.³⁰ Psychological control depends on the feelings associated with particular low control emotions that may motivate aversion to hostile action, emotions such as fear, sadness and surprise.³¹ Indeed, feelings constitute the core element of emotional experience as they provide information about the situation as well as motivation to act on that information. First and foremost, feelings act as a unique source of information that in turn affect beliefs, judgments, thoughts and perceptions.³² Fear and sadness, for example, are likely to make the adversaries pessimistic, risk-averse and doubtful about their own capabilities to deal with the situation.³³ Surprise can suspend cognitive processes altogether, rendering the adversary unable to understand the situation.³⁴ Feelings also direct motivation, which is essential to make the adversary act or abstain from acting.³⁵ In strategic practice, fear often motivates adversaries to freeze or to flee.³⁶ Meanwhile, sadness motivates people to abandon their initial objectives and surprise suspends the motivation for action altogether.³⁷ Finally,

²⁹ Note that this does not mean that high control emotions are useless in strategic practice. In some cases, making the adversaries angry may be beneficial. For instance, it is easier to lure them into a trap when they feel confident about their capabilities rather than when they are cautious. This is what the Spartans and their allies aimed for when they were ravaging the Athenian territory during the Peloponnesian war. Therefore, the strategic utility of individual emotions does not inevitably overlap with their contribution to psychological control.

³⁰ Nico Frijda, Antony Manstead, and Sacha Bem, 'The Influence of Emotions on Beliefs', in *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*, ed. Nico Frijda, Antony Manstead, and Sacha Bem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

³¹ Smith and Ellsworth, 'Patterns of Cognitive Appraisal in Emotion', 830–34.; Markwica, *Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy*; Zilincik, 'Strategy and the Instrumental Role of Emotions'.

³² Gerald L. Clore and Karen Gasper, 'Feeling Is Believing: Some Affective Influences on Belief', in *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*, ed. Nico Frijda, Antony Manstead, and Sacha Bem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10–39; Jan B. Engelmann and Hare Todd A., 'Emotions Can Bias Decision-Making Processes by Promoting Specific Behavioral Tendencies', in *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*, ed. Andrew S. Fox et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 355–59; Lerner et al., 'Emotion and Decision Making'; Norbert Schwarz, 'Feelings-as-Information Theory', in *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, ed. Paul A.M. Van Lange, Arie W. Kruglanski, and Tory E. Higgins (Washington: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2010), 289–308.

³³ Dacher Keltner and Jennifer Lerner, 'Fear, Anger and Risk', *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology* 81, no. 1 (July 2001): 146–59; David Kavanagh and Gordon Bower, 'Mood and Self-Efficacy: Impact of Joy and Sadness on Perceived Capabilities', *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 9, no. 5 (October 1985): 507–25; Smith and Ellsworth, 'Patterns of Cognitive Appraisal in Emotion'.

³⁴ Marret K. Noordewier and Seger M. Breugelmans, 'On the Valence of Surprise', *Cognition & Emotion* 27, no. 7 (2013): 1326–34.

³⁵ Edmund Rolls, *Emotion and Decision-Making Explained* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–4.

³⁶ Thierry Steimer, 'The Biology of Fear- and Anxiety- Related Behaviors', *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 4, no. 3 (September 2002): 231–49. Despite the low control appraisal, fear can also sometimes motivate adversaries to fight; this tendency will be discussed in the penultimate section of this article.

³⁷ Keith Oatley and Philip Johnson-Laird, 'Towards a Cognitive Theory of Emotions', *Cognition and Emotion* 1, no. 1 (June 1986): 36; Noordewier and Breugelmans, 'On the Valence of Surprise'.



emotions affect the adversary's memory. Events and situations connected to the feelings of intense emotional experience are likely to be better remembered than those with no intense emotional mark.³⁸ By affecting memory, emotions increase the chances that the low control feelings about the situation last longer than the episode of emotional experience. In sum, by making the adversary feel weak, particular low control emotions orchestrate the emergence of psychological control.

Finally, it is time to show how psychological control relates to the adversary's will to fight. Mirroring its physical counterpart, psychological control is a matter of degrees rather than a binary phenomenon.³⁹ The ideal type of control is tantamount to the total collapse of adversary's will to fight. In this case, the adversary feels so weak that she/he deems surrender as the only feasible option. But psychological control occurs more often in its weaker forms, where it conveys dissuading feelings about particular courses of actions. Feeling weak about the exercise of specific actions, the adversaries may abstain from fighting by particular tactics or in particular domains. For instance, they may abandon the search for decisive battle and turn to guerrilla tactics instead. Similarly, they may cease to conduct offensive operations on land and focus on airpower's sole use instead. It follows that in various degrees, psychological control is a common feature associated with strategic practice rather than something elusive that can only be produced rarely and after putting up utmost efforts. The next section explores how strategists can produce psychological control through violent actions.

Psychological control and violent emotion regulation

This section delves deeper into the literature on emotion regulation to explain how strategists manipulate violence to achieve psychological control. Emotion regulation is the process by which people elicit or transform someone's emotions. People usually regulate emotions unconsciously by simply going on with their usual business. They tend to do things that bring them positive emotions and to avoid the activities that produce the negative ones. Sometimes they do the reverse, because negative emotions may be useful in specific situations.⁴⁰ This is not much different in the military context, though conscious emotion regulation is more prevalent there. For example, commanders tend to inspire their troops or make them fearless by motivational speeches.⁴¹ Military drills are supposed to give individual soldiers the impression that whatever happens, they are in control of the situation and should just keep up their regular activity.⁴² Similarly, Edward Luttwak explains that the main reason why Roman soldiers laboured to build fortified camps every day was to make sure that they felt in control of the situation regardless of battlefield

³⁸ Elizabeth A. Kensinger and Jaclyn H. Ford, 'Retrieval of Emotional Events from Memory', *Annual Review of Psychology* 71, no. N/A (2020): 251–72.

³⁹ Wylie admits that control is about degrees when he asserts that 'The primary aim of the strategist in the conduct of war is some selected degree of control of the enemy for the strategist's own purpose' See Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Control*, 77.

⁴⁰ Gross, 'Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects, *Psychological Inquiry*', 5.

⁴¹ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Art of War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 98.

⁴² Roose Delahajj, Anthony Gaillard, and Joseph Soeters, 'Stress Training and the New Military Environment' (RTO, 2006), 5, <http://www.rto.nato.int/abstracts.asp>.



results.⁴³ Emotion regulation is then part and parcel of human existence, whether in peace or in war.

Approaches to emotion regulation differ widely, depending on several factors. The intended emotional experience may be the end in itself or it may constitute means to achieve some other purpose.⁴⁴ In order to assess the potential effect of strategic practice on the adversary's sense of control, this paper focuses on the latter case. For the same reason, I focus on the extrinsic regulation, which deals with the attempts to manipulate others' emotions, rather than on the intrinsic regulation, which focuses on the internal manipulation of emotions by the subjects themselves.⁴⁵ Finally, there are five emotion regulation approaches: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change and response modulation.⁴⁶ The latter three approaches depend exclusively on the adversary's cognitive processes and behaviour, which makes them irrelevant to the current research. In contrast, situation selection and situation modification can be performed by the strategists themselves and this quality makes the two approaches particularly relevant for this research. Emotion regulation through situation selection conveys 'taking actions that make it more (or less) likely that one will be in a situation that one expects will give rise to desirable (or undesirable) emotions.'⁴⁷ This approach aims to create a completely new environment that is likely to elicit or transform the emotions of the adversary. Emotion regulation through situation modification means 'taking actions that directly alter a situation in order to change its emotional impact.'⁴⁸ Instead of creating a new situation, this approach aims to modify the existing one so that the adversary may experience some other emotions.

The two approaches to emotion regulation can be exercised by two basic actions of strategic practice, offence and defence. Following the logic of Clausewitz, offence refers to military activity aimed at conquest, while the concept of defence conveys the parrying of that offensive blow. Offence selects the situation by deciding on the time and the place where the assaults takes place. Defence, whose main characteristic is awaiting the attack, may modify that situation by the development of positional advantage, by the launch of counterattacks and by the shifting of reserves or reinforcements.⁴⁹ Of course, strategic practice is an interactive phenomenon consisting of countless attacks and blocks. Therefore, the theoretical borders between offence and defence as well as between situation selection and situation modification may be blurred in reality. Still, the distinction is a useful one to understand the different potential of attack and defence to regulate the emotions of the adversary.

Before proceeding to the analysis, one caveat is in order. This paper does not argue that strategists at all times and places aim to regulate the emotions of their adversaries. It

⁴³ Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 61–62.

⁴⁴ Gross, 'Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects, *Psychological Inquiry*', 5.

⁴⁵ Gross, 5.

⁴⁶ Moshe Maor and James J. Gross, 'Emotion Regulation: Implications for Political Science and International Relations' (The Politics of Non-Proportionate Policy Response, Warsaw: ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, 2015).

⁴⁷ Gross, 'Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects, *Psychological Inquiry*', 8.

⁴⁸ Gross, 8.

⁴⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 357–58.



is more likely that strategists aim to degrade the will of the adversary by whatever means and methods they find appropriate. Indeed, it is quite likely that much of the emotion regulation in strategic practice happens as an accidental consequence of strategic performance. In other words, the regulation of emotions can often be a side effect of strategic practice rather than the primary aim of the practitioner. In any case, although strategists often get the violent emotional regulation process into motion, they do not necessarily guide it at every moment.

Emotion regulation through offence

This section aims to examine and elaborate on how one can use offence to select the situation so as to elicit low control emotions. Offensive action, possessing the advantage of initiative, can do this by selecting the favourable time and space of the engagement. This is a tremendous advantage, because the two variables can elicit low control appraisal even before the clash with the defender and they can also considerably shape the character of the potential engagement.

Several military theorists envision that skilfully conducted attacks can render the defenders unable to comprehend what is happening and thus make them feel low control over the whole situation. This school of strategic thought goes by the labels such as manoeuvre, dislocation, or strategic paralysis and it can be traced back to Sun Tzu's writings.⁵⁰ At the core of the approach is the notion that attacks launched at the right time and place may distort an adversary's sense of control over the evolving situation. Basil Liddell Hart and John Boyd are amongst the more famous recent proponents of this approach. Hart argues that one can make the enemy feel powerless by dislocating his forces through crafty manoeuvres.⁵¹ Boyd is more specific when he asserts that strategists can scare and surprise the adversary by the skilled use of guerrilla or blitzkrieg tactics.⁵² He further claims that one should aim to elicit uncertainty, fear, panic and chaos by degrading the adversary's freedom of action.⁵³ Edward Luttwak describes the actual psychological effects of penetrating attacks against the adversary's lines of supplies in much the same manner.⁵⁴ In general, attacks can elicit low control emotions such as surprise (if the defender does not expect them), fear (if they threaten something valuable to the defender), or sadness (if they inflict irredeemable losses on the defender's forces).⁵⁵

One illustrative case of how offence can select the situation and elicit the appraisals of low control is the American Civil War and Ulysses Grant's campaign in the summer of 1863. In that campaign, Grant selected the situation by choosing to conquer the Confederate city of Vicksburg. For this purpose, he launched several simultaneous but

⁵⁰ Adam Elkus, 'The Rise and Decline of Strategic Paralysis', *Small Wars Journal* (blog), 20 September 2011, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-rise-and-decline-of-strategic-paralysis>.

⁵¹ Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridan, 1991), 194.

⁵² Frans Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 164.

⁵³ Osinga, 173–76.

⁵⁴ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, 2nd ed. (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 99–106.

⁵⁵ Lazarus, 'Relational Meaning and Discrete Emotions', 64; Ira Roseman, 'A Model of Appraisal in the Emotion System: Integrating Theory, Research, and Applications', in *Appraisal Process in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, ed. Klaus Scherer, Angela Schorr, and Tom Johnstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 70–71.



synergic attacks to confuse his adversaries, the Confederate generals John Pemberton and Joseph Johnston. The Union commander combined amphibious landings at Grand Gulf, a cavalry attack through central Mississippi and a manoeuvre to threaten the confederate positions at Snyder's Bluff.⁵⁶ Grant then outmanoeuvred and defeated both Pemberton and Johnston and captured the important cities of Jackson and Vicksburg. Michael Ballard describes the psychological consequences of Grant's actions on the confederate general in the following words: "much was going on, and Pemberton has lost control of it...(he) had been reduced to a state of total uncertainty.... Grant's diversion has worked beautifully."⁵⁷ Ballard adds that Pemberton was "overwhelmed" by the situation.⁵⁸ Both Johnston and Pemberton felt gradual loss of control over the unfolding situation. Pemberton wrote to Johnston that "unless a large force is set at once to relieve it, Vicksburg must before long fall. I have used every effort to prevent all this, but in vain."⁵⁹ Johnston felt no more in control as he emphasized that "Our joint forces cannot raise the siege of Vicksburg."⁶⁰ Adding that "I am too weak to save Vicksburg".⁶¹ Both generals felt low control over the unfolding situation and saw themselves as unable to improve it. Gradually, they felt their options restricted and ultimately their will to fight collapsed and they surrendered Vicksburg to Grant after a short siege. In this case a series of offensive situation transformations by the Union general produced various degrees of psychological control over his adversaries.

Emotion regulation through defence

This section aims to examine and elaborate on how one can use defence to modify the existing situation so as to elicit low control emotions. Clausewitz understood defence to be "the stronger form of war," because it can rely upon positional advantage, it allows launching of counterattacks and it can make a good use of reserves and reinforcements.⁶² These factors, especially when combined, may lead to modifying an existing situation to such an extent that the former attacker becomes the defender and vice versa.

The first way in which defence can change a situation is the build-up of a strong positional advantage. This approach can elicit low control appraisals both before and during the strategic performance takes place, with the former mechanism being known under the label of deterrence by denial.⁶³ The essence of this approach is the development of a strong defensive position to make the adversaries afraid of the potential failure of their attacks and, therefore, lower their will to attack. However, even if the adversary launches the attacks, strong defensive position may prevail, gradually lowering the adversary's appraisal of control. A short episode from the Thirty Years War (1618-1648)

⁵⁶ Williamson Murray and Wayne Hsieh, *A Savage War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 309–11.

⁵⁷ Michael Ballard, *Pemberton: The General Who Lost Vicksburg* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), 140.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 169.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 175.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Clausewitz, *On War*, 360–66, 210-211.

⁶³ Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security.*, First Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).



can illustrate this approach. By the late summer of 1632, the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus was ravaging imperial lands and gradually progressing toward Vienna. Then the imperial commander Albrecht of Wallenstein brought the Swedish campaign to a sudden halt. While the Swedish king was at Nuremberg, Wallenstein fortified an advantageous position near that city. Gustavus found himself in a dire position "facing a well-prepared fortification occupied by a large army and with no obvious way of attacking it successfully."⁶⁴ The Swedish king felt so little control that he recommended Nuremberg's citizens to sue for peace with the Imperials, but the city refused.⁶⁵ Being afraid of attacking the fortified position, the Swedes tried to lure the Imperials into a pitched battle, but Wallenstein refused to cooperate. The Swedish king then sent his forces to attack Wallenstein's fortified camp, but the attack failed miserably. After the attack, Gustavus asked Wallenstein for the terms of peace and retreated a few days later.⁶⁶ Thus, modifying the situation by developing and holding a strong defensive position, Wallenstein gradually achieved psychological control over the Swedish king. Gustavus' sense of control shrank gradually but in the end his willingness to fight collapsed completely.

The second way in which defence can modify situations is through counterattacks. Counter-attacks have similar emotion regulation potential to regular attacks with one difference, they are even harder to anticipate in advance. Whereas the general thrust of the regular attack can be guessed in advance, counter-attacks from defensive positions usually stem from expediency's impulses rather than from long-term careful planning. For this reason, their regulatory potential may be even more potent than of the regular attacks, especially for the emotion of unpleasant surprise. Sometimes, counter-attacks may even change the situation so much that they present the original attacker with a completely new context. For example, during the Great Northern War (1700-1721), a coalition of Russia, Denmark and Poland decided to launch a series of synchronized attacks against Sweden and its allies. Attacking simultaneously and from different sides, the allies tried to force Sweden to sue for disadvantageous peace. But the Swedish king, Charles XII, refused to accept this script. Instead of remaining on the defensive, he counter-attacked against Denmark and forced the latter out of the war. During this process, Charles significantly changed the existing balance of military power and the whole situation. The sudden appearance of some ten thousand Swedish troops at the gates of Copenhagen constituted an unpleasant surprise as well as a reasonable fear stimulus not only for the king of Denmark but also for his allies.⁶⁷ Consistent with the general characteristics of surprising counter-attack, in this case, the strategist achieved psychological control almost instantly rather than gradually.

The third way for defence to modify situations is to shift reserves or to bring about reinforcements.⁶⁸ The appearance of new forces on the battlefield can have a huge psychological impact on the adversary's appraisal of control. Throughout military history,

⁶⁴ Geoff Mortimer, *Wallenstein: The Enigma of the Thirty Years War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 158.

⁶⁵ Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus: A History of the Art of War from Its Revival After the Middle Ages to the End of the Spanish Succession War, With a Detailed Account of the Campaigns of the Great Swede* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1895), 347.

⁶⁶ Mortimer, *Wallenstein: The Enigma of the Thirty Years War*, 164.

⁶⁷ Robert I. Frost, *The Northern Wars* (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 229–30.

⁶⁸ Attackers can do this too but it is more common for defenders to keep substantial forces undeployed because the latter seldom know the location and the time of attack while the former do.



attackers besieging castles and fortresses had to be careful not to become besieged themselves. The relief forces could often completely change the situation by sandwiching the original attacker between two hostile armies. While some attackers, as Caesar at Alesia (52 BC), managed to cope with the situation thanks to the overwhelming superiority of their forces, the situation was still likely to cause serious psychological distress for the original aggressor. The Athenian expedition to Sicily, which occurred in the middle of the Peloponnesian war, provides an illustration of how the attacking force became besieged and how the commander of that force felt the control slipping away from his hands. While Nicias, the chief commander of the Athenian forces at Sicily, gained some initial successes, these were quickly reversed when the Peloponnesian force under Gylippus came to strengthen the Syracusan position. Nicias, who was always sceptical about the prospect of the expedition, grew increasingly pessimistic. The sudden appearance of the Peloponnesian reinforcements intensified his initial worries, which in turn decreased his sense of control over the situation. In a letter attributed to him by Thucydides, Nicias worried that the adversary kept getting stronger while his own forces were degrading. Even though the Athenians still controlled the coastal area, Nicias felt it unlikely he could proceed successfully for a long time. He complained that "The position therefore is that we, who thought we were the besiegers, have become in fact the besieged...."⁶⁹ This sentiment betrays Nicias felt his options limited as he suggested that Athenians either recalled the whole expedition or sent him substantial reinforcements too, indicating he did not consider it feasible to continue with the operations conducted in the previous manner. Therefore, the Peloponnesian reinforcements modified the situation of the attacking force to such an extent that Nicias became the defender and felt it necessary to either end the operation or modify the situation once again.

Emotion regulation through both offence and defence

The most potent approach to emotion regulation is likely to be the one which combines the advantages of both offence and defence. Strategists using this approach can select the situation in the first place and then modify it as they see appropriate. There is a tradition of strategic thinking known to combine strategic offensive with tactical defensive.⁷⁰ In a more modern parlance, it is more famous under the *fait accompli* label.⁷¹ The Hussite armies of medieval Bohemia won many of their victories in this way and Helmut von Moltke was a big fan of this approach as well, both in his writings and in practice.⁷² The essence of the approach resides in the strategist first using an attack to conquer a part of territory and then switching to a defensive to reap the fruits of positional advantage, counterattacks and reserves. The strength of this approach is that it can regulate the emotions of the adversary during both phases. The conquest itself may be enough to shatter the adversaries' will to fight. But if the adversaries resolve to attack,

⁶⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. M. I. Finley, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 7:11-15.

⁷⁰ Hart, *Strategy*, 181.

⁷¹ Dan Altman, 'By Fait Accompli, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries' 61, no. 4 (December 2017): 881-91.

⁷² Helmuth von Moltke and Daniel Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (New York: Random House, 1995).



they will be in a disadvantageous position because the place of the attack was already chosen by the "defender".

Emotion regulation through *fait accompli* is still a common strategic practice in the contemporary world. For example, Western strategists view the prospect of a Russian *fait accompli* in the Baltics as a serious problem.⁷³ This is the case not only because of the potential Russian territorial achievements, though these alone are likely to elicit intense emotions, but also because such a step would leave NATO's commanders in a bad position. If NATO wanted to regain the lost territory; it would have to wage an uphill battle. The allies would face superior odds and potent anti-access and area denial capabilities.⁷⁴ As Milevski sums it up, a *fait accompli* "would present NATO with an unenviable strategic situation of a very large policy objective, comparatively weak political will, and imposing obstacles to success."⁷⁵ The alliance would also be vulnerable against spontaneous counterattacks, as due to the geographic proximity, the Russians would be able to reinforce their positions in the area more effectively than NATO. All this is likely to make the Western decision-makers feel low control over the unfolding events. Consequently, a Russian *fait-accomplis* may first make NATO generals surprised or sad and the prospect of fighting back is likely to make them scared.⁷⁶ These emotions are likely to decrease the allied will to pursue largescale conventional invasion to regain the lost territory or they may even render the allies unwilling to fight at all.

Factors which amplify or hinder the violent emotion regulation

It is tempting to argue that the more strategists transform situations the more likely they are to elicit the desired emotions. However, emotions, just like war or strategy, are immensely complex phenomena. The output is not always proportional to the input. The chaotic nature of strategy and human psychology makes it possible for small changes to have large psychological effects and vice-versa. It follows that emotion regulation in strategic practice is not about certainty but about maximizing the probabilities that a situation selection or change produces the desired emotional effects. The strategist needs to understand which factors are likely to augment and hinder his efforts. Some of the factors may affect the appraisal of low control, others may affect the experience of emotions and still others may transform this experience. The salient factors examined below include the personalities of the opposing commanders, the universal bias toward

⁷³ Elbridge Colby and Jonathan Solomon, 'Facing Russia: Conventional Defence and Deterrence in Europe', *Survival* 57, no. 6 (November 2015): 21–50.

⁷⁴ Alexander Lanoszka and Michael Hunzeker, 'Confronting the Anti-Access/Area Denial and Precision Strike Challenge in the Baltic Region', *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 5 (December 2016): 12–18.

⁷⁵ Lukas Milevski, *The Wests East: Contemporary Baltic Defence in Strategic Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 159–60.

⁷⁶ There are ongoing debates about what kind of emotions Russian *fait accompli* can elicit. Barry Posen, for example, has suggested that such a move will make Europeans angry and, therefore, increase their will to fight. In contrast, Douglas Barrie and his colleagues have argued that fear is at least equally likely to occur. These assertions are mere speculations but they highlight the salient role *fait accompli* may play in violent emotion regulation. See Douglas Barrie, Ben Barry, Henry Boyd, Nick Childs & Bastian Giegerich (2021) Europe's Defence Requires Offence, *Survival*, 63:1, 19-24; Posen, Barry. 'Europe Can Defence Itself'. *Survival* 62, no. 6 (2021): 18.



confidence, the character of warfare, the values ascribed to the objectives, the influence of other low control emotions, and the actions of the adversaries.⁷⁷

First, the personalities of the adversaries matter. Strategists should seek to learn about their adversaries' biases, personality traits and experience. This knowledge will allow them to decide whether psychological control is a reasonable objective to aim for or whether they should concentrate their efforts on the physical control alone. In certain cases, the elicitation of low control appraisal may be exceptionally hard. For example, some historians consider the Union commander Ulysses Grant to be a man who seldom cared much about what the other side was doing.⁷⁸ Adversaries with this kind of attitude are not the best objects of emotion regulation as no amount of situation transformation is likely to impress them. At other times, strategists may be able to achieve psychological control with little effort. Another Union general, George McClellan, permanently felt low control over the changing situations, despite facing numerically weaker adversaries throughout his career.⁷⁹ Knowing the adversary's personality is an age old requirement for successful strategic practice, it is therefore not an additional burden for a strategist to bear.⁸⁰ However, the knowledge itself has no value if the strategist does not use it to achieve psychological control.

Second, people tend to feel control rather than its absence. From the evolutionary perspective, those who felt control were more successful than the others.⁸¹ This is because feelings of control inspire confidence which in turn motivates active rather than passive pursuit of one's desires. While it may get the individual into problems, the usual benefits seem to outweigh potential problems. It is especially common in wars, as overconfidence leads people to start wars even though their chances may be low and to sustain the effort far beyond the reasonable cost.⁸² Confidence is norm rather than an exception and the strategists need to understand they will have to overcome it. They need to approach the adversary as an inherently biased individual and not as a "blank slate". It may be useful to think of overconfidence as a natural friction which needs to be dealt with in order to get to the psychological control. The success of eliciting low control appraisals by violent performance depends on the degree to which this barrier can be overcome.

Third, not all strategic contexts are neutral in their potential to elicit appraisals of low control. For example, the quality and quantity of relative capabilities at belligerents' disposal simply matter. It may be easier to select or change situations when facing a handful of scattered and demoralized soldiers than when facing an adversary who possesses sophisticated combined arms teams augmented by close air support. But it is not only about troops and arms. In all its ever-changing variety, the character of war itself can affect the capability to elicit appraisals of low control. Some experts argue that today's

⁷⁷ The list of these factors is inspired by the fundamental observations derived from human psychology and from strategic theory. The short list should suffice to capture the essentials but it is not necessarily exhaustive.

⁷⁸ Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 100.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁰ Sun Tzu and Roger Ames, *The Art of War* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1993), 80.

⁸¹ Shelley E. Taylor and Jonathan D. Brown, 'Positive Illusions and Well-Being Revisited: Separating Fact From Fiction', *Psychological Bulletin* 116, no. 1 (1994): 21–27.

⁸² Dominik D. P. Johnson, *Overconfidence and War: The Havoc and Glory of Positive Illusions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6–15. Richard Wrangham, 'Is Military Incompetence Adaptive?', *Evolution and Human Behavior* 20, no. 1 (January 1999): 3–17.



very strategic environment is particularly prone to the appraisals of low control. This is supposed to result from the ever-increasing complexity and uncertainty of war in the 21st century.⁸³ Strategic actors now come in many forms, from non-state organizations to supra-national entities. They pursue strategy in the unprecedented number of combat domains and share and manipulate information rapidly. It is not surprising that humans, who are used to operating in simpler and slower environments, find the contemporary world uncertain and beyond their control. At the same time, some degrees of complexity and uncertainty are common to war across all ages.⁸⁴ While some strategists may appraise the character of contemporary warfare as particularly hard to control, it would be unwise to assume that everyone appraises it in the same way automatically. Still, by understanding the differences in strategic contexts, strategists may be able to better anticipate their actions' psychological effects.

Fourth, both offense and defence can elicit appraisals of low control without eliciting the desired emotional experience. This goes back to what emotions are all about – they are related to people's concerns. It follows that even the best executed attacks or the most formidable defences are unlikely to generate strong emotions if the adversary does not value the relevant objects. In his recent book, Donald Stoker argues that "The necessity of understanding the value of the object being sought cannot be underestimated. Everything else flows from this."⁸⁵ Emotions and the psychological control they bring about ultimately flow from the values the belligerents ascribe to particular objects and objectives. This is why a prudent strategist always seeks to find out what the adversary cares about. For example, during the Peloponnesian war, the Athenian traitor Alcibiades advised the Spartans to establish a permanent fortress on Athenian territory because he knew how much the Athenians cared about the farmlands for their food supplies. Being one of them, he understood the threat the permanent Spartan stronghold would pose to Athenian wellbeing. As Thucydides indicates, the fortification of Decelea was one of the worst things that could happen to the Athenians.⁸⁶ In their search for successful psychological control, strategists should always keep in mind that understanding the values their adversaries ascribe to particular objectives is the necessary prerequisite for successful emotion regulation.

Fifth, not all low control emotions contribute to the generation of psychological control. Emotions such as hope, hatred and even some instances of fear may motivate the pursuit of hostile behaviour rather than its abandonment. Hatred is a particularly troubling emotion because it is likely to be elicited by repeated applications of violence (that is by strategy). Despite the inherent feeling of weakness, it motivates the adversary to pursue hostile actions and seek a total annihilation of the strategist.⁸⁷ Likewise, fear and the associated "fight" response conveys the potential for the continuation of hostilities instead of their abandonment.⁸⁸ Hope is less of a problem because it is unlikely to be elicited by the application of violence (though other stimuli may trigger it) and it has no strong motivational tendencies either way.⁸⁹ Strategists cannot influence which particular low

⁸³ Delahajj, Gaillard, and Soeters, 'Stress Training and the New Military Environment', 8.

⁸⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*.

⁸⁵ Donald Stoker, *Why America Loses Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 56.

⁸⁶ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 7:28.

⁸⁷ Agneta H. Fischer et al., 'Why We Hate', *Emotion Review* 10, no. 4 (2018): 309–20.

⁸⁸ Markwica, *Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy*, 73–74.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 77–79.



control emotion their application of violence elicits. If psychological control emerges, it will be based on low control emotions, however, not every instance of low control emotion results in psychological control – that depends on the character of the particular emotion. In sum, low control emotions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for psychological control.

Sixth, even when strategists succeed in eliciting the desired emotions, the adversaries may counter the effects by emotion regulation of their own. The adversaries may frustrate the strategist's effort by, intentionally or not, employing any of the emotion regulation approaches. They may select new situations or change the existing ones. They may deploy their attention to completely different endeavours and reappraise the situation, seeing opportunities where one would expect them to see threats. By any of these measures, adversaries may make their emotional experience less intense or they may even transform it. The particulars of that transformation depend on the emotions which are already present. For example, there is some psychological evidence that it is easier to transform fear into anger than it is to change sadness into anger and vice versa.⁹⁰ The fact that adversaries may actively regulate their own emotions implies that psychological control may be unstable. It may require continuous effort rather than a single action and even this may still not be enough to sustain the control.

Conclusion

Psychological control stands for the emotional feeling of relational weakness that motivates abstinence from hostile actions. As a feeling it is always associated with particular courses of actions, it varies in degrees but it is present, in some form, most of the time. Strategists produce psychological control, intentionally or not, by the exercise of violent emotion regulation. Offence, defense as well as the combination of the two transform situations and elicit low control emotions. Depending on their intensity and character, these emotions then convey some measure of psychological control by shaping judgments, thoughts, perceptions, motivations and memories of the adversary. The success of violent emotion regulation depends not only on the strategist's ability to transform situations but also on the adversary's psychological profile and actions as well as on the character of war in a particular context.

The duration of the particular instances of psychological control depends on an interaction between two competing trends. On the one hand, emotions tend to enhance both the appraisals that give rise to them and the memories associated with the emotional experience. Hence, the natural tendency of psychological control is to propagate itself. Conversely, factors such as the changing character of war or the adversary's cognitive processes and actions may hinder or even reverse the whole process of emotion regulation. These features are likely to render psychological control temporary. To sum it up in the Clausewitzian jargon, the actual duration of any instance of psychological control

⁹⁰ Jun Zhan et al., 'Distinctive Effects of Fear and Sadness Induction on Anger and Aggressive Behavior', *Frontiers in Psychology* 75, no. 6 (2015): 1–12; Karen P. Winterich, Han Seunghee, and Jennifer S. Lerner, 'Now That I'm Sad, It's Hard to Be Mad: The Role of Cognitive Appraisals in Emotional Blunting', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 20, no. 10 (2010): 1–17.



depends on the interaction between the phenomenon's internal nature and the external circumstances of any given context.

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