

Commentaries & Replies

On “Strategy Versus Statecraft in Crimea”

Stephen Blank

© 2014 Stephen Blank

This commentary is in response to Łukasz Milewski's article "Strategy Versus Statecraft in Crimea" published in the Summer 2014 issue of Parameters (vol. 44, no. 2).

Lukas Milewski contends Russia, in at least the initial Crimean phase of its ongoing invasion of Ukraine, employed strategy while the West used statecraft. Readers may be inclined to agree with his argument, as within this framework Milewski implements the social sciences definitions of strategy and statecraft. However, his analysis is far too charitable to the West. Facts show Moscow employed a strategy, refined since 2006, if not earlier, that represented an audacious, innovative, and tactically brilliant operation, even if arguably strategically reckless. No objective account of the Western response can call European and American measures “statecraft” for they were and remain incoherent, timorous, and futile. The West’s confusion, surprise, and inability to grasp the seriousness of Russian ambitions, the stakes in this crisis, or to uphold its obligations toward Ukraine (ratified in the 1994 Budapest Agreement) do not deserve the name statecraft. Rather they represent a dismaying and still uncorrected failure to perceive the need for either sound policy or coherent strategy.

US officials seem to have no real policy towards Russia. Its refusal to practice any kind of deterrence indicates not only a continuing failure to comprehend the essentials of sound strategy and policy, but a loss of will. If the purpose of US foreign deployments in Europe and Asia is to deter and reassure allies, this policy ranks as a major failure that extends an increasingly depressing tradition.

Still worse, it appears the ability of US intelligence to detect and assess Russian capabilities and intentions is quite insufficient. Laying blame on Edward Snowden’s defection to Russia or our lack of Russian specialists may be partially correct, but these are also self-serving and insufficient responses. In fact, we have repeatedly committed unjustified and egregious strategic errors, and responded anemically to Russian threats. Claiming Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea could not be foreseen is utterly unfounded, as many specialists, including this author, have given such warning for years.

Such intelligence and policy breakdowns are by now commonplace, and include the failure to recognize how quickly China modernized its military, the rise of ISIS, etc. These cases underscore a much vaster and therefore much more dangerous and pervasive series of failures atop our national security processes. We can label these failures a miscarriage of statecraft, but world politics is a more exacting and severe judge. In this court, repeated failures invite ever greater and more serious challenges. However elegant our theories, we have been warned, and found wanting

Dr. Stephen Blank is a Senior Fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council. He has published over 1000 articles and monographs on Soviet/Russian, U.S., Asian, and European military and foreign policies, testified frequently before Congress on Russia, China, and Central Asia, consulted for the CIA, major think tanks and foundations.

in the real world; and we will endure ever greater challenges until we get both strategy and statecraft right.

The Author Replies

Lukas Milevski

Stephen Blank writes powerfully on Russian foreign policy and the West's mediocre political performance with regard to Russia. In large part I do not disagree with anything he has written in this commentary, which I believe serves to supplement my article.

Because there is value in having concepts with clear boundaries, my article employed the age-old distinction between strategy and statecraft, a distinction which certainly predates modern social sciences. This is particularly the case when dissimilar forms of power are competing, as in Crimea. The dynamics of interaction between these disparate forms of power tend to be understudied and misunderstood, resulting in the loss of the importance of the opponent's use of strategy, rather than statecraft, and the subsequently erroneous belief that statecraft may overturn strategy in a direct confrontation.

Neither strategy nor statecraft imply any particular quality. Historically, most strategies have failed—for there is always a loser in war, and even winners often fail to achieve the initial political goals for which they went to war. Statecraft is likely to have a similar historical track record. The West collectively practiced statecraft against Russia during the Crimean crisis, yet without sufficient statesmanship to ensure its efforts could succeed. Blank is certainly correct about that.

Due to my article's narrow ambitions, the wider patterns of Russian foreign policy are not directly relevant, useful though they are in providing a background to the crisis. Blank is widely and expertly published on the subject. I have no wish to contest him on his home ground; nor do I see the need to, as I agree with what he has written. In the interests of keeping concepts clearly distinct, I would merely suggest that, since 2006, Russia has pursued a foreign policy which has been alternatively served by strategy (most obviously during Georgia 2008, Crimea and eastern Ukraine 2014) and by statecraft.

Perhaps it is Russia's flexibility in its choice of instruments, including armed force, which has bedeviled Western attempts to counteract Russian foreign policy, particularly given the common Western refrain that armed force is losing utility. If one automatically assumes military force has no utility, one is unlikely to imagine the possibility of annexing Crimea, regardless of those who suggest otherwise. If one cannot imagine why anyone would wish to revise or overturn the international status quo, one cannot anticipate actions which lead toward that conclusion. Ken Booth warned of the dangers of ethnocentrism in 1979. Those dangers remain with us today. Europe's widespread dependence

upon Russian gas, of course, does not help in crafting powerful counter-policies to Putin's recent foreign policy.

We must indeed get both strategy and statecraft right. This requires not just knowledge of the respective logics of strategy, statecraft, or of the foreign policies of particular states with which we may have to deal. Strategy and statecraft are both directed by the judgment of individuals, and judgment requires imagination to anticipate how our instruments and actions may influence the future. We can only hope our writings provide fertile soil to nurture that imagination and, occasionally perhaps, point it in the right direction.

On “Strategy Versus Statecraft in Crimea”

Christopher Mewett

© 2014 Christopher Mewett

This commentary is in response to Lukas Milevski’s article “Strategy Versus Statecraft in Crimea” published in the Summer 2014 issue of Parameters (vol. 44, no. 2).

In a clash of opposing wills, the side that is willing to resort to violence will usually defeat the side that is not. This truism, convincingly stated in a single sentence, occupied Lukas Milevski for more than a dozen pages in the last issue of *Parameters*. Clausewitz made the same point rather more succinctly almost 200 years ago: “If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand.”

For the Prussian, this logical proposition was merely a start point for a deep and systematic consideration of war’s unique nature—a treatment of the subject that stands unequalled in the history of Western military thought. Milevski seems content, on the other hand, to re-state what is already widely known: power politics backed by the threat of force will triumph over indifference and inaction. The dichotomy he establishes between strategy and “statecraft” does little to improve our understanding of how states behave, or of why their policies succeed or fail. We are left with little more than old Clausewitzian wine, in new confusingly-labeled skins.

The article’s thesis is the “dynamics and outcome of the Crimean crisis were determined by disparate assumptions and methods of thinking on the part of the West and Russia” (23). At root, this means Russia was willing to countenance the use of force to resolve the crisis in its own favor, while other states were not. Milevski explains the two sides’ “disparate assumptions and methods of thinking” by detailing what he understands to be the significant differences between two types of state behavior: strategy and statecraft. Strategy, we are told, is primarily concerned with “threatened (or actual) violence,” as it “is by definition adversarial and seeks victory.” Statecraft, by contrast, is said to be “merely competitive and seeks common ground and agreement” (25).¹

Of course, all of this can be stated in simpler and more familiar terms. Statecraft describes all forms of international politics, while war – the tool of strategy – “is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means” (*On War*, 87). This formulation may have a familiar ring for readers of the journal.

Making sense of this revelation – understanding what it means to characterize war as a “true political instrument” and “not merely [as]

¹ Milevski acknowledges that strategy is actually a sub-set of statecraft, which comprises state-on-state activity “ranging from persuasion to coercion” to include the use of force, but he does not grapple with the implications of this taxonomic overlap (24).

Christopher J. Mewett is a support contractor with the Department of the Army. He studied history at Texas A&M and central and eastern European studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. His research interests include the history of military thought, Clausewitz, American strategy in Vietnam, and US Army doctrine.

an act of policy” – was perhaps the most important intellectual challenge of Clausewitz’s final years. The text of *On War* is inconclusive and unsatisfying on this point, and poses an enduring test to modern interpreters. Milevski’s essay fails to engage meaningfully with this issue, only superficially considering the way violence alters the dynamics of a conflict and ignoring altogether the tension central to war’s dual nature: it is both *violent politics* and *political violence*, and yet its nature is different to those of either violence or politics.

Condensing *all* political action outside war into something “typically conducted via diplomacy” but that “tends, therefore, toward persuasive means of achieving political objectives” – is to accept an impoverished idea of national power and the mechanisms through which it can work. Are economic sanctions a “persuasive means”? What of blockade or embargo? Direct-action special operations, subversion, espionage, assassination, and sponsorship of terrorism are tools that may be used by one government against another without rising to the threshold of war; are these things governed by the logic of strategy or of statecraft? What about raids, or drone strikes, or other isolated applications of airpower?

Many of these tools have violence at their core; but their method of operation on the will of the adversary has more in common with sanctions and diplomacy than with a comprehensive military campaign aimed at destroying fighting forces or conquering territory. The same is true of propaganda and the use of armed proxies as a thumb on the scale of a neighboring state’s politics: however important may be the threat of violence, these means function in fundamentally political (rather than military) ways.

The application of national power through violence *does* differ in meaningful ways from the use of other policy instruments, and Milevski is right to underline this fact. Military force can indeed serve as a form of messaging, however imprecise and open to misinterpretation. But the operative mechanism at war’s logical core is destruction; the message implicit in all military action in war is “I can make things worse for you,” and what’s ultimately at stake is nothing less than the effacement of one’s personal and political existence.

Can Milevski’s framing of statecraft and strategy as analytically distinct categories of thought and action help us to explain differences in state behavior, or does it merely describe differences that emerge from already well-known causes? Does it help us to predict or even simply to understand outcomes in inter-state competition, or does it just validate those outcomes and make them seem inevitable after the fact? Is a difference in mental models the simplest and most plausible explanation for Russia’s success in enacting its will in Crimea against the objections of Western states, or has Milevski confused effect with cause?

“The smaller the penalty you demand from your opponent, the less you can expect him to try to deny it to you; the smaller the effort he makes, the less you need make yourself.” Clausewitz introduces this self-evident truth of politics by way differentiating war from unconstrained violence—to underline the controlling influence of politics on action in war. The state that cares more usually tries harder. Thus ever was it so.

The Author Replies

Lukas Milevski

Christopher Mewett has written a late but undoubtedly powerful critique of my recent article. Although Mewett argues with some justice that the strategy-statecraft dichotomy may not provide satisfactory insight into the many gray areas between war and diplomacy, it strikes me that we do not necessarily disagree all that much. Our disagreements stem primarily from method of argument and presentation, and only secondarily over substantive issues. Mewett's commentary may be reduced to three basic, inter-related points: 1) nothing new is being said in the article; 2) the strategy-statecraft dichotomy does not work; 3) the dichotomy is unnecessary in any case, as other factors explain the results of the Crimean crisis.

On the first point, I surely hope I have said nothing new! In direct confrontations, harder power defeats softer power—regardless of what, and how consequential, the longer-term effects of that softer power may ultimately be. It would be most unfortunate if this were to come as a revelation to those who think about or practice strategy and policy. Yet the hesitant responses, and their apparent purposes, offered by many Western governments to the events in Crimea seemed to indicate that observers and policy-makers believed softer forms of power might overcome the effects of the introduction of armed force. It thus seemed useful to reiterate what should already have been known. Even if policy-makers did not believe their own statements surrounding the utility of their actions in the Crimean context, they might have misled others about their actions' usefulness. Mewett may, of course, disagree with that assessment.

Mewett's second point is much weightier than his first, as he doubts the functionality of the dichotomy I employ in my article. Any rigid distinction between classical strategy and statecraft does seem to be relatively inapt in considering questions of blockade and embargo, among other instruments which Mewett identifies. I implied a broader spectrum of statecraft in my brief discussion by noting the existence of coercive diplomacy even while distinguishing it from strategy. This appears to have been insufficient for the purpose, given Mewett's commentary. Nevertheless, Mewett's overall point here is well taken, as I argued the strategy-statecraft distinction focusing on Crimea, in accordance with my topic. If that distinction requires revision or abandonment for other contexts, so be it. Nonetheless, I still suggest coercive diplomacy of any flavor (arguably up to and including coercion such as Operation Rolling Thunder) remains closer to diplomacy than to strategy—but that would be a different argument, a different article, and certainly not a commentary.

Running throughout the entirety of Mewett's commentary is his third point, really a theme, that the dichotomy employed offers no insight into behavior which observers do not already gain through other

analytical tools at their disposal. I suggest rather strategy and statecraft, as I classify them in the article, are reflections of behavior; they represent assumptions and expectations of effect to be derived from acting with the respective set of tools. As I noted in relation to Mewett's first point, many Western policy-makers appeared to have misinterpreted the significance of Russia's (semi-deniable) employment of force in Crimea. They therefore misread the effect this use of force would have on the course of the crisis and so attempted to act against it with instruments which were inappropriate for their apparent expectations. However, it was precisely their very different geographical proximities, interest disparities, and so on, which led the respective actors to choose either armed force or non-military options. The dichotomy is thus, as already mentioned, a reflection of behavior through which we can interpret actions and events, rather than behavior as such.

Moreover, Mewett ascertains the article particularly fails to address the question of what he describes as the tension in war's nature between violent politics and political violence. As Clausewitz himself did not untangle this last point in *On War* attempting to do so in an article about what was effectively a non-war, rather than an actual war seems overambitious and partially besides the point. The main purpose of the article was neither to describe nor extol the dichotomy as such or to delve into the nature of war, but rather to examine the interaction between military and non-military instruments and particularly to distinguish the uniqueness of force from the rest. Such an interaction can occur either in a wartime setting or in a conflict short of war, such as Crimea. The dichotomy establishes the difference between force and the other instruments of political power, so their respective influences on the course of events may be identified. This, in turn, returns to Mewett's first point on whether or not this is new. It is not. But, given the West's apparent rhetoric and performance in March 2014, this reminder may hopefully prove useful even without any novelty, whether to policy-makers or to their audiences!

On “Military Professionalism & Private Military Contractors”

Christopher Mayer

© 2014 Christopher Mayer

This commentary is in response to Scott Efflandt's article "Military Professionalism & Private Military Contractors" published in the Summer 2014 issue of Parameters (vol. 44, no. 2).

The social contract between the military and the society it protects will evolve, as it always has and always will. These changes drive contemporary challenges to traditional notions of professionalism. In “Military Professionalism and Private Contractors,” Colonel Scott Efflandt argues the primary source of contemporary challenges comes from “private contracting companies,” and particularly private security companies. He proposes these companies “are actively and passively contesting the US military’s professional jurisdiction over its core task – the authority to employ lethal force as the agent of the state.” In support of this proposition he cites secondary sources claiming recent legislation and regulations undermine the commander’s authority to control these contractors on the battlefield. These assertions are based on a misunderstanding of the role of private security companies and US legislation regarding these actors.

Private security companies are not agents of the state for the employment of lethal force. First, private security companies do not exclusively work for governments. Most contracts for armed private security services are with private entities, such as the petroleum industry, mining concerns, and even non-governmental organizations. They cannot, therefore, be considered agents of state authority in the same way as military forces. Second, they are not used for the employment of lethal force in any way which resembles that function in the armed forces of a state. The use of force by private security companies is limited to self-defense and the defense of others from unlawful attack. This is not combat or direct participation in hostilities. It is the inherent right of individual self-defense. The International Committee of the Red Cross, in its *Interpretive Guidance on the Notion of Direct Participation in Hostilities* specifically excludes individual self-defense and defense of others against unlawful violence as meeting the threshold for direct participation in hostilities. This is true even when the attackers are members of the armed forces of a belligerent party.

Combat, on the other hand, defined as “operations to actively seek out, close with, and destroy a hostile force or other military objective by means of, among other things, the employment of firepower and other destructive and disruptive capabilities,” is inherently governmental and reserved for military performance (DODI 1100-22). This reservation is specified in law, policy, and Defense Instructions (e.g., OMB Cir A-76, OMP PL 11-01, DODI 1100-22). This division is reflected in international agreements such as *The Montreux Document on Pertinent Legal*

Mr. Christopher Mayer is the Director, Contingency Contractor Standards and Compliance in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Program Support). He is responsible for Defense Department policy and programs regarding private security contractors. Mr. Mayer is a 2008 graduate of the U.S. Army War College.

Obligations and Good Practices for States Related to Operations of Private Military and Security Companies During Armed Conflict. This document clarified the status of private security companies personnel as civilians, enjoying similar protections as other civilians and subject to applicable national criminal law. It also describes use of force and firearms by private security companies only when necessary in self-defense and the defense of third persons.

Instead of blurring the line between private contractors and military forces, legislation and regulations enacted over the past ten years clarified this distinction and enhanced the authority of the military commander. COL Efflandt points out that the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007* placed contractors in contingency operations under the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*. This supplemented, and did not replace, previous applicability of the *Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act* to Department of Defense civilians and contractors. The UCMJ is used in cases where no other law is suitable or applicable. The change was tested in 2008, when a dual national Canadian-Iraqi citizen working on a US contract was found guilty by court-martial for assault and attempted murder.

The *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008* did not, as COL Efflandt maintains, remove contractors employed by other government agencies from military oversight and investigation. Section 862 of that Act requires all private security providers under contract for any federal agency operating in an area of combat operations or other significant military operations to comply with orders, directives, and instructions issued by the applicable commander of a combatant command, including rules for the use of force, and to cooperate with any investigation conducted by the Department of Defense.

Section 833 of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011* provided further controls over private security companies supporting contingency operations. This legislation directed the Defense Department to develop business and operational standards for private security companies. These standards do not nullify the authority of the combatant commander. Instead, they provide a reference for the combatant commander to specify minimum requirements for private security companies technical competence, a means to evaluate performance, and a method to hold the companies accountable under contract law. Certification with this standard is not mandatory, as COL Efflandt states. Rather, the law gives the Department the option to consider certification to the standard as one of several evaluation criteria in a contract award. Commanders may – and do – supplement the requirements of this standard through military orders and directives. Through the development of these standards and other initiatives, the Department of Defense has actually increased the reach of the principles upon which American military professionalism has been based by extending their logic in a way that could be used by other clients of private security services.

By law and custom, the armed forces of a state remain the only profession privileged to engage in combat. Only members of the armed forces are allowed to use lethal force on behalf of the state, and enjoy immunity from the charge of murder or other homicide; but such use must be consistent with the laws and customs of war. Private security

companies do not share this privilege in theory or practice. Despite a decade of maturation in defining the roles, limitations, and controls over armed commercial security services in complex contingencies, COL Efflandt's article demonstrates how much more work is needed to educate military and civilian leaders about private security companies. The *US Army War College Quarterly* should be commended for publishing COL Efflandt's work and the two accompanying articles in the Summer 2014 edition. The challenge now is to incorporate a proper understanding of the role of operational contract support into our military education system and other professional development and outreach.

The Author Replies

Scott L. Efflandt

My compliments and thanks to Mr. Christopher Mayer on a thoughtful and well written contribution on the effect of private security companies on the military profession. I agree with his two conclusions; a) much work is needed to educate military and civilian leaders about private security companies, b) the challenge is to incorporate a proper understanding of the role of operational contract support into our military education and professional development. However, I would add a third conclusion, c) the need to understand how private security companies are continuing to change the military profession. This is the research question of my research to date. Using Abbott's model, a profession is defined by its jurisdiction as determined by the resolution of competition with other professions in three areas—legal arena, public opinion, and the work place.

As to legal competition, Mr. Mayer offers a substantive counter-argument which I think is best addressed by others in subsequent research. Legal opinions aside, one must also consider the consequences of competition in the workplace and the court of public opinion when assessing the effects of private security companies on the military profession. Today we see an unprecedented number of armed non-military personnel performing duties previously done by uniformed service members—many (but not all) of whom are sanctioned by the state.

Likewise, the public remains very predisposed to using private security companies. Since the initial publication of my article events in the Middle East have sparked a credible public dialog on the viability of forming a contract force to assist Iraq in lieu of using the US Army as “boots on the ground.” The purpose of examining all three of these areas is to answer these questions: has the US military profession ceded jurisdiction? If so, how will this change effect US civil-military relations?

Mr. Mayer has provided important information on the legal battle for jurisdiction, but it is only part of the answer to these two larger questions. I look forward to the research of other scholars, who will continue to work in this important area. May they find our two contributions meaningful.