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HISTORY'S STEER ON UNLOCKING STALEMATE IN UKRAINE

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FROM THE EDITOR

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

When the words on this page could conceivably have been formulated by a natural language processing tool driven by artificial intelligence, and the once seemingly fantastical dreams of synthetic training environments and autonomous military systems are being realised, talk of Troy may suggest to more cynical readers that this publication's 'finger' is nowhere near being placed on the pulse of contemporary issues.

History, however, has much to contribute to current conversations on the conflict in Ukraine. Not least because the war being fought today in Europe shares traits with many of yesterday's fights. As evidenced by the battlefield reflections of James Sladden, an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research (CHACR), in the previous issue of *The British Army Review*, war in 2023 is not perhaps as many would have predicted. Precision strikes and 'clean' combat, in which only legitimate military targets are at risk of harm, are conspicuous by their absence in Ukraine, with trench systems and close-quarter battles for every inch of terrain unexpectedly back on-trend. A familiar deadlock has developed despite the quantum advancements in technology.

There is, at the time of publication of this special edition of *The British Army Review*, considerable pressure on the Ukrainian government (and, therefore, by extension the Ukrainian High Command and wider military) to launch the long-awaited 2023 'Spring/Summer Counter-Offensive' in a bid to break the bloody stalemate.

Lessons of history, however, provide some notes of caution. If (or when?) the counter-offensive is launched it will need to succeed – and 'succeed' in this case means not only that there will be an imperative for marked Ukrainian military successes, but also that the strategic tectonic plates will need to have shifted in Ukraine's favour. This, then, is a time for level-headedness and professional competence, with military action linked firmly to strategic goals, and thus the 'thinking through to the finish' that Field Marshal Slim urged upon military leaders is equally applicable to strategic leaders. This, we at the CHACR believe, is a time for wisdom to triumph over impatience.

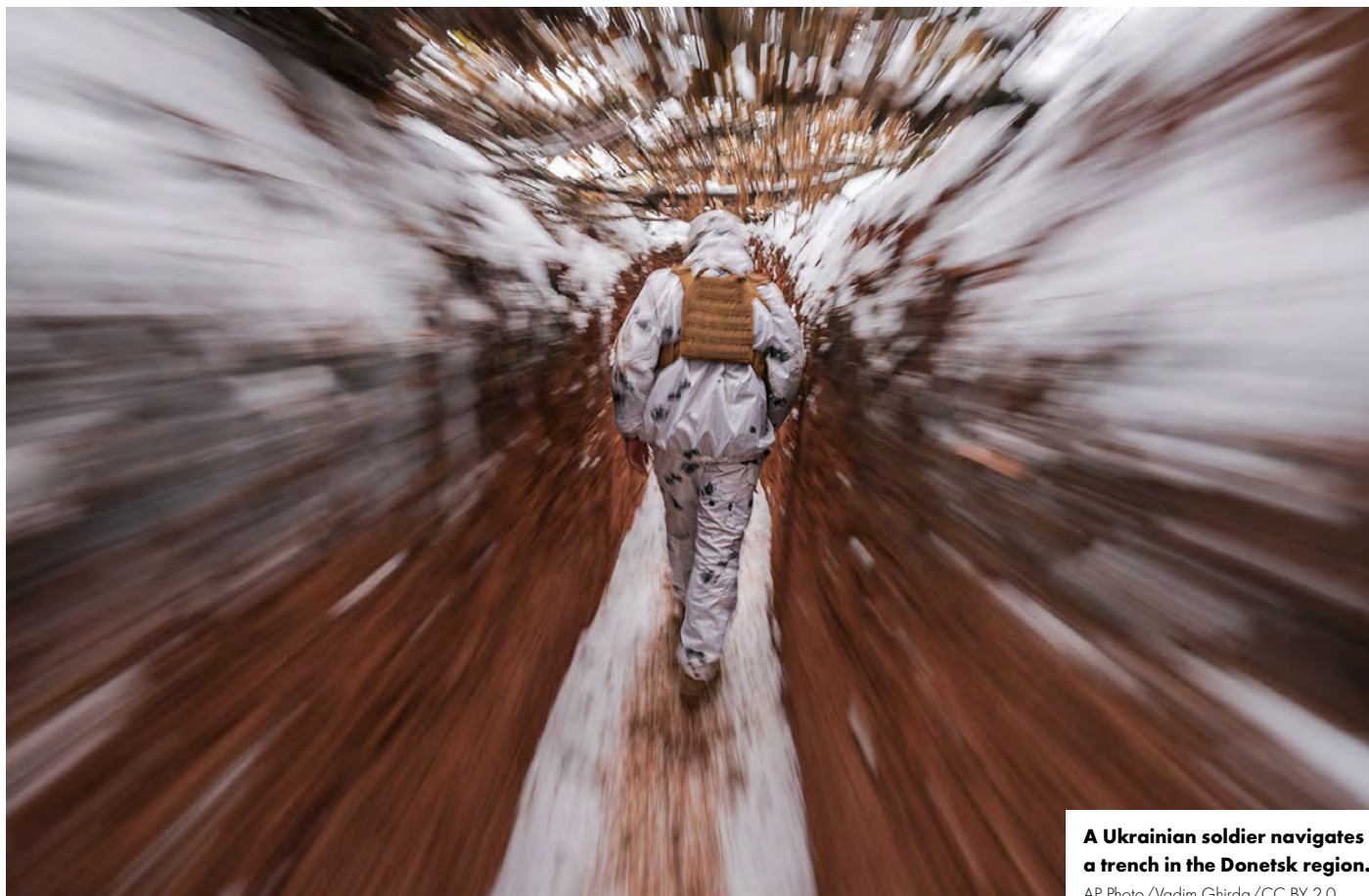
"We have tried to look at how those lessons [of the long history of stalemates] might be seen as useful to a re-equipped, reinforced, retrained and battle-hardened Ukrainian military, not just to turn the tide (because tides have a nasty habit of turning back again with predictable regularity), but to open the floodgates and ensure that the flow is unstoppable all the way to a favourable conclusion."

With this in mind, it was felt that it might be useful, and timely, to share some of the thoughts that have found their way into our discussions over the last few months. Ever-conscious of the short-termist (and sometimes thinly-informed) debate in anticipation of a newsworthy shift of the lines on studio graphics and maps, the CHACR team conducted a rapid wave-top skim of the long history of stalemates, stalemate-breaking and counter-offensives in war.

Mindful that this will need to be a phase of the war in Ukraine that goes beyond the ebb and flow of a vicious military tide, we have tried to look at how those lessons might be seen as useful to a re-equipped, reinforced, retrained and battle-hardened Ukrainian military, not just to turn the tide (because tides have a nasty habit of turning back again with predictable regularity), but to open the floodgates and ensure that the flow is unstoppable all the way to a favourable conclusion. And, with so much of the international community now behind them, in a world of changing leaderships, fickle public opinions, impatient politics and media, ill-informed voices of great influence and ever-changing strategic imperatives, they may only get one chance to get it right.

Although the lead author of this *British Army Review* special was our Director, Major General (Retired) Dr Andrew Sharpe, this has been a whole-of-team effort and particular thanks should be given to Kiran Suman-Chauhan, on attachment from Exeter University, for his work on the Sri Lankan case study. – Andrew Simms

SPECIAL EDITION



A Ukrainian soldier navigates a trench in the Donetsk region.

AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda/CC BY 2.0

BREAKING BAD: HISTORY'S STEER ON UNLOCKING STALEMATE IN UKRAINE



AUTHOR

Major General (Retired) Dr Andrew Sharpe is the Director of CHACR and completed 34 years of military service and nine operational tours.

ACCOUNTS of stalemates and the breaking thereof, in military history, and, indeed, military legend, are legion. None are more famous, perhaps, than the siege of Troy, which laboured on for years, with conflict, negotiation, combat and atrocities on both sides, before it was resolved by the ruse and subterfuge which ended in the tipping of the balance and the complete downfall and destruction of one side by the other.

After ten years of seemingly unbreakable stalemate the Trojan defences crumbled, and: *"...So stole Odysseus down from the Horse: with him followed the war-fain lords of Hellas' League, orderly stepping down the ladders, who down them now on this side, that side, they streamed like fearless wasps startled by stroke of axe in angry mood pouring all together forth from the tree-bole, at sound of the woodsman's blow; so battle-kindled forth the Horse they*

*poured into the midst of Troy with hearts that leapt expectant... And all about the city dolorous howls of dogs uprose. And miserable moans of strong men stricken to death; and every home with awful cries was echoing."*¹

The acme of operational and tactical art (and arguably strategic art too) centres upon the holding and exercising of the initiative. Where neither side is able to seize, hold and exploit the initiative then a stalemate ensues. This situation is precisely that which currently pertains to the Ukrainian war.

CONTEXT

Sixteen months after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and after the ebb and flow of war has seen a high tide of Russian advance being driven back to the current largely stagnant front line, stretching from Kherson, along the

¹ Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica*, Book xiii.

Azov coast and north through the Donbas, the situation seems to have reached something of a stalemate. Some saw the re-capture of Kherson in November 2022 as an indication of Russian failure and weakness; others saw it as the sensible operational re-shaping of the front by Russia, by choice, in order to manufacture a much more sustainable defensive impasse. The 'meat grinder' of Bakhmut has held our attention, but the lines on the analysts' maps have changed very little over the last few months. We must beware, however, of seeing this stalemate as an equilibrium between the protagonists – either in capability or in outcome. Even if the most optimistic of pro-Ukrainians who proclaim that Russia is a 'spent force' are right, Russia still holds 20 per cent of Ukraine's territory (territory rich in resources such as rare earth minerals) and, spent or not, is likely to prove very hard to eject from land, both in the Crimea and the Donbas, that has been in their hands since the annexation of the Crimea in 2014. And, whether competent or incompetent, spent or not, Russia still appears to have plenty of artillery (and ammunition for that artillery) and a ready supply of manpower (whether conscripted under new laws that allow their deployment into war, or recruited from the streets or prisons of Russia to fight as Wagner mercenaries). Strategists and policy writers who are writing Russia off as 'spent', whether in the short or long term, are almost certainly making an optimistic assumption or two on the route to this conclusion.² In short, from the expanse of the Dnieper River in the south to the trenches of the Donbas in the east, the current front line represents a military stalemate of sizeable proportion, and Russia is unlikely either to cede the advantage that she holds in terms of territory, or to give up the fight without a dramatic turn of events – or a superior understanding, by one side or the other, of operational art, operational and tactical tipping points, and the husbanding of the balance of resources.

Furthermore, if a ceasefire were called, agreed upon by both parties, enforced and moderated by outside parties and the fighting stopped, it would be unwise to consider that the stalemate had been resolved. Putin would still be an indicted suspected war criminal. Russian war aims, no matter how they were painted by the Kremlin's propaganda machines, would not have been met. Ukraine would still consider itself occupied and violated. Putin's political position would be no more (and probably less) secure. Zelensky's political position would be no more (and probably less) secure. Frozen



A Ukrainian trench line at the Battle of Bakhmut [November 2022].

Mil.gov.ua, CC BY 4.0

"We should consider that the 'stalemate' may not just be found in the trenches of the front lines between the two protagonists, but may also be seen in the wider relationships between Russia and Ukraine (and the other nations of the former Soviet Union) and, more broadly, between Russia and the West."

conflicts, arguably, are simply stalemates made longer lasting and less resolved.

Finally, in terms of this context, one should exercise extreme caution in writing Russia off as being unlikely to continue, for as long as it takes, to seek ways to resolve this apparent stalemate to their conclusive advantage. Russia has a long track record of absorbing setbacks, re-examining itself, re-arming itself, and returning with a vengeance using old methods reinforced or re-examined, or new methods learned or devised. And if we are to understand the context in its full extent, we should consider that the 'stalemate' may not just be found in the trenches of the front lines between the two protagonists, but may also be seen in the wider relationships between Russia and Ukraine (and the other nations of the former Soviet Union) and, more broadly, between Russia and the West. Regardless of the outcome of any spring/summer offensive in southern or eastern Ukraine, one struggles to draw up a realistic picture in which either the immediate confrontation between Russia and Ukraine is rapidly and definitively concluded, or the on-going long-lasting rumbling confrontation between Russia, NATO and the wider western world is resolved to mutual satisfaction. Like the 'peace-dividenders' of the 1990s, 21st century strategists should beware of the over-optimism

that casts aside several centuries of pragmatic realism in the interests of short-term hope and the search for quick fixes. In seeking to 'break the stalemate', strategic thinkers will therefore need to consider not just the tactical and operational mechanics of the problem, but also that wider regional and global context.

WHAT DOES HISTORY TEACH US?

The first thing that military history teaches us, in this respect, is that war and warfare, as often as not, contain periods of stalemate. This, therefore, is not an unusual phenomenon – the situation in Ukraine is not unusual, but rather is a state of affairs that one could reasonably expect to occur; and one that ought to be familiar to anyone, professional or otherwise, who takes more than a casual interest in the use of armed force for the resolution of conflict. The Cold War was one long stalemate. World War One represented nearly four years of stalemate. Wellington's war in the Iberian Peninsula, even though it represented a protracted campaign of manoeuvre and counter-manoeuve, was as much about the management of stalemate, to advantage, as it was about seeking the clash of arms for conflict resolution. Fabius 'Cunctator' brought about the demise of Hannibal in the Second Punic War, after Hannibal's resounding tactical success at the Battle of Cannae in 216 BC, not by confronting him on the battlefield, but by coaxing him into operational stalemate. Montgomery and Rommel in North Africa, despite the considerable geographic flow back and forth across the North African desert, were, ultimately, simply managing a stalemate while seeking a way of tipping the balance (either through tactics, or resources, or both) to deliver a decisive outcome in a hitherto inconclusive campaign. Hitler's Barbarossa ended in the stalemate that was ground out in Stalingrad before Stalin's Bagration turned the tide back the other way. Alfred the Great manufactured a stalemate which he sat out in the Somerset Levels before he could seize his moment to re-confront the Viking threat.

In a trite way, it might be fair to say that: 'Rule number one of warfare is: if doesn't look like you are about to win, make sure that, at least, you don't lose'. If that is so, and I suggest that it is a fair place to start, then the deliberate or accidental manufacture of stalemates is an almost inevitable feature of any protracted conflict as both sides seek 'not to lose' while they attempt to prepare themselves, to advantage, for the resolution of the conflict. And conflict resolution is likely to come in one of two ways: agreed or imposed solutions from outside the warring parties (diplomatic, enforced, negotiated or otherwise); or the conclusive return to more active hostilities

²A state of affairs discussed in detail in the MOD SONAC/Chatham House workshop of Thursday 13th April 2023.



A long 'Grapple': Members of the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire (left) patrol Pucarevo and a Light Dragoons' Scimitar guard a main supply route as part of the British Army's contribution to the United Nations Protection Force in Bosnia. Courtesy of Soldier Magazine, © Crown copyright

by one party once it perceives that it has prepared itself, in some way, decisively to over-match its opponent, and/or the collapse of one of the warring parties, regardless of the actions of the other, in the event that it can no longer sustain the effort required to maintain the stalemate, or to turn it to their advantage. It may be useful to consider each of those options in turn.

Agreed or imposed solutions

History holds many cautionary tales for those strategists who seek to solve the problems of military impasse with externally enforced or brokered resolutions. Agreed or imposed solutions are, almost inevitably, the result of uncomfortable compromises. Neither side is likely to be fully satisfied nor fully dissatisfied. Grievances are unlikely to have been fully resolved. But, one may argue, under such circumstances at least the actual fighting has stopped, a degree of normal life can be resumed and 'the conflict has been resolved'. Under these circumstances the military stalemate would have been broken through mutually-agreed or externally-brokered ceasefire and conflict resolution. But is 'resolution' the right word? Many might argue that, far from resolving stalemates, such solutions merely temporarily remove the armed conflict from the problem, thereby perpetuating the roots of the problem and thus fossilising the strategic stalemate in place, unresolved, with the ever-present threat that, absent externally constraining factors, the stalemate will break apart at some time downstream and re-enter open conflict. Furthermore, history, both recent and distant, shows us that imposed solutions often bring with them the biases of the imposing parties, such that the immediate solutions may

bring with them lasting, and not necessarily helpful, side-issues and consequences.

"...In 1995 the international community gave birth to three children in Bosnia, triplets; one they abused, one they spoiled, one they neglected – the results are pretty predictable..."³

After a civil conflict of the most wicked and violent kind, by 1995 the warring parties in Bosnia had reached something of a military stalemate, and the presence of UNPROFOR [United Nations Protection Force], the UN peacekeeping mission, was unlikely to help to bring that stalemate to a decisive conclusion one way or the other. Thus the Dayton Peace Agreement on Bosnia-Herzegovina effectively ended the Bosnian civil war and imposed a new mandate of external and internal governance upon Bosnia. This not only formally ended the fighting, but also was the legitimacy foundation that subsequent international brokerage in Bosnia required. The discussions leading to the signing of the agreement took place from the 1st to the 21st of November 1995 at Wright-Patterson US Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Overseen by the international Contact Group (members of which carried with them their personal and national biases and perceptions of who was at fault, an aggressor, a victim, and so

on), the product of the discussions, between a Bosnian delegation (led by Izetbegović), a Federal Republic of Yugoslavia delegation (led by Milošević) and a Croatian delegation (led by Tudjman) led to the drawing up of an agreement known as the General Framework Agreement for Peace (or 'The GFAP').⁴ The agreement was subsequently formally signed in Paris on the 14th of December that year.

In the GFAP the parties agreed: 'to cooperate fully with all entities involved in implementing the peace settlement'.⁵ In stark contrast to the grid-locked conflict and the always-contested mandate of the UNPROFOR years, this important line in the agreement gave those subsequently appointed by the international community an essential legitimacy and authority to issue direction and guidance. And it obliged (through their own agreement) the parties and entities involved in the subsequent stabilisation, re-building and governance of Bosnia to cooperate with that direction. The 12 annexes which provide the detail of the agreement and its implementation cover: the military aspects; regional stabilisation; inter-entity boundaries; elections; the constitution; arbitration; human rights; refugees and displaced persons; a commission to preserve national monuments; public corporations; civilian implementation; and an international police task force. This, therefore, seemed to break the confrontational stalemate, end the conflict, and provide the international community with fairly comprehensive coverage of the tools that would be needed productively to guide the protagonists to a positive future, with the logjam of armed confrontation effectively removed. The military stalemate, it seemed (and to some still seems), was resolved

³Dr Ian Ralby, executive Director of IR Consilium and advisor to the government of Republika Srpska, interviewed by the author on 22 April 2013.

⁴The Dayton Agreement and the GFAP available online at state.gov/www/regions/eur/bosnia/dayton.html and www1.umn.edu/humanrts/icty/dayton.html

⁵Dayton Agreement, Article IX

and 'normal' life could be resumed.

Despite the apparent authorities laid out in Dayton, however, the mediating parties had (rightly, many would argue) seen the cessation of violent conflict as the primary and pressing goal. They had seen the 'stalemate' in military terms. Dayton provided the international community with considerable governance powers, but post-conflict civil implementation had been a low priority during the negotiations, which concentrated principally on the perceived-to-be most pressing issues of the conditions for conflict termination, territorial divisions, and military detail. For many of the parties involved in the negotiations (including the Bosnian entities themselves) post-war practicalities were a side-issue. The point of Dayton was to stop the fighting.

It is of significant interest, in this context, however, that the succession of High Representatives in Bosnia, from Carl Bildt in 1995 to the current incumbent Christian Schmit, have described, in their different ways, the Dayton Agreement as their most powerful enabler and the most formidable obstacle to meaningful, long-lasting resolution. The point here is that the strength of the agreement was to be found in the unbreakable lines that had to be drawn on the map, and the inviolable conditions set, agreed upon and enforced, in order to reach agreement. They worked – the fighting stopped. Such immovable lines and unbreakable conditions, however, have been used nefariously by various protagonists from 1995 onwards as a tool to prevent meaningful progress. Dayton stopped the fighting, but it didn't solve the conflict.

"...the Dayton arrangements are associated less with peace than with dysfunction. In part that is because Dayton was more a truce than a settlement. The elaborate governing architecture created at Dayton froze in place the warring parties (Republika Srpska and the Federation) and rewarded their commitment to ethnically-based control of territory. Since then, kleptocratic ethno-nationalists have manipulated Dayton's provisions to entrench their power at the expense of the country's viability."⁶

There are plenty of other such examples. Perhaps the most obvious of these is Cyprus:

⁶Wilson Center Report; *Fixing Dayton: A New Deal for Bosnia and Herzegovina*; wilsoncenter.org/publication/fixing-dayton-new-deal-bosnia-and-herzegovina

⁷peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unficyp

⁸See, for an example among many such articles on the subject: theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/18/unease-in-the-air-as-cyprus-ghost-town-rises-from-the-ruins-of-war



Enduring divide: A sign in the buffer zone – also known as the Green Line – of Nicosia, which has proved well trodden territory for British troops serving as part of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.

Sgt Dave Rose (RAF)/UK MOD © Crown copyright 2020

"In seeking to solve the military stalemate, it could be argued, modern UN-overseen Cyprus is the copybook example of a stalemate cast into stone and made unresolvable."

the UN has been engaged in active conflict prevention in Cyprus since 1964, keeping the Greek and Turkish communities of the island from inflicting violence upon each other. The opening headline of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) web-page claims that it is: 'Contributing to a political settlement in Cyprus.'⁷ The presence of UNFICYP did not, however, prevent the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974 (ten years after the establishment of the mission), nor has it actually produced a 'political settlement' or, indeed, a settlement of any kind. UNFICYP, nearly 60 years on, simply continues to hold the protagonists apart. In seeking to solve the military stalemate, it could be argued, modern UN-overseen Cyprus is the copybook example of a stalemate cast into stone and made unresolvable. Anyone who, at any time in the last 50 years, has walked around the deserted Marie Celeste streets of Varosha/Famagusta on the east coast of Cyprus can attest that there the stalemate seems very stale indeed – and a very long way from resolution.⁸

Bosnia and Cyprus are but two of modern

history's examples of imposed solutions that were implemented, with degrees of cooperation and concession from the parties in conflict, in order to break or end military stalemates. In so doing they sought not just to exercise Field Marshal Slim's famous exhortation to 'think it through to the finish' but actually to force it through to the finish by externally-imposed solutions. The problem in these two cautionary tales, however, is that 'the finish' in question was confined to a (laudable) intent to terminate the immediate military/armed conflict. Military minds were thinking things through to a 'military finish'. The resolution of the military stalemate, in both cases, has simply resulted in the freezing of the strategic stalemate. The conflict itself remains unresolved, bubbling away under the surface and waiting for an excuse to erupt.

The lesson here for those seeking an end to the fighting in Ukraine, therefore, is to beware of being blinkered by the admirable imperative to end the violence in isolation. Putin, and those around him, are unlikely to be comfortable with any compromise that threatens their position in the Kremlin. Russia has no history of being comfortable with humiliating climb-downs. Zelensky, and those around him, spurred on by righteous indignation at the wicked excesses of Russia's soldiers and mercenaries, are unlikely to be comfortable with any compromise that does not see the return of Ukrainian territory (and people), and retribution against Putin and those around him. It is hard to see a way, therefore, towards a self-imposed (between the two parties), satisfactorily-negotiated, mutually-agreed, lasting solution to resolve the military stalemate. Any such solution would therefore likely need to be a brokered and/or imposed solution from external actors. Such imposed solutions carry all of the caveats exposed above. In short, any intent from external actors, no matter how well-motivated, to intervene to impose a solution to the military stalemate must come fully cognisant of the imperative to be prepared to manage the strategic consequences of such a solution, rather than simply broker the solution itself and expect the job to be complete. Imposing a lasting and satisfactory solution to the military stalemate can only have true value if it is done in a way that will deliver equally lasting and satisfactory strategic outcomes. That is 'a very big ask'.

Tipping the scales to achieve overmatch

Military common sense, from the writings of Sun Tzu onwards, suggest that there is little wisdom in fighting your enemies under circumstances where you are likely to lose. Except when there is no other choice but to 'do

or die', seeking ways of avoiding the fight until the circumstances are favourable as old a tactical, operational and strategic wisdom as warfare itself.

For some 13 years, from 865 until 878, King Alfred 'The Great' had fought alongside his brother (King Aethred) until Aethred's death in 871, and then in his own right as King of Wessex, against the invading Danes and Vikings. Throughout this time the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had suffered a series of defeats and setbacks, with Alfred himself, and the small remnants of his army, forced to seek refuge in the boggy maze of the Somerset Levels. A stalemate ensued, with the Danes and Vikings unable to dislodge Alfred, and the Anglo-Saxons too weak to confront the invaders in a meaningful clash of arms. From here, and his fortress on the island of Athelney, Alfred did little more to resist the invasion than to sally forth in limited forays and disruptive raids, raising supporting bands where he could from the local fyrds of Somerset and Wiltshire. Alfred bided his time in the marshes (despite pressure to sally forth in strength and confront the Vikings). Over a period of months, he avoided confrontation in strength, sent out messengers, made plans, gathered to himself a strong core of leaders and reliable fighting men and ventured out himself only to consult with the leading ealdormen, thegns and reeves of Wessex.

When he sallied out in May 878 he did so confident that the fyrds of three shires, armed and ready, would join him on his march to challenge the Danes. He calculated that he had generated sufficient capability not just to have a good chance of tactical success but, providing he chose where he struck wisely, of operational exploitation for strategic effect. The magnitude of the Danish and Viking armies that confronted the Anglo-Saxons was considerable, but they were spread out across the kingdoms of England. Alfred had decided to concentrate his forces against a single target that would deliver the best effect at his first attempt, rather than draw his enemies into a massed and decisive confrontation. Intelligence having located the army of the Danish King Guthrum camped near Westbury in Wiltshire, Alfred concentrated his forces against this single target, achieving both operational surprise and localised capability overmatch, and struck. The Danes were soundly defeated at the Battle of Edington in Wiltshire, and Alfred then immediately mounted a focussed and aggressive pursuit and follow-up to Chippenham, King Guthrum's operational base, which was swiftly besieged and reduced. Guthrum, and his leading chieftains, were forced to convert to Christianity and return to East Anglia in a humiliating settlement. By this act of patience, capability-building, timing,

"Alfred bided his time... over a period of months, he avoided confrontation in strength, sent out messengers, made plans, gathered to himself a strong core of leaders and reliable fighting men... By this act of patience, capability-building, timing, tactical surprise, concentration of force, and robust, persistent and decisive exploitation the stalemate was broken, a numerically superior invading force driven back, terms reached, and Alfred's Anglo-Saxon kingdom consolidated and secured."

tactical surprise, concentration of force, and robust, persistent and decisive exploitation the stalemate was broken, a numerically superior invading force driven back, terms reached, and Alfred's Anglo-Saxon kingdom consolidated and secured.

Of the seven years of the Peninsular War (1807 to 1814), despite it being a war of considerable

operational manoeuvre and the movement of troops over large distances, repeated sieges and battles, and the changing and re-changing of hands of towns, cities, fortresses and territory, the first five and a half years of that conflict were spent largely in operational stalemate. In 1807 the French, assisted by their then Spanish allies, invaded Portugal and seized Lisbon, forcing the flight to Brazil of the Royal Family and Government. In the countryside Portuguese resistance continued. In 1808 through subterfuge, 'grey zone activity', military infiltration and then the force of arms, France seized control of Spain, placing a succession of puppet governments on the throne. Spain rose against the French and the ebb and flow of conventional and unconventional warfare produced a seemingly unresolvable state of conflict across the Iberian Peninsula. 1908 also saw both Napoleon's and Sir Arthur Wellesley's (later the Duke of Wellington) entrance into the campaign (though they never directly confronted each other) and an ebb and flow of operational clashes that ended with the withdrawal of the British expeditionary force at Corunna. Despite France having the upper hand at this stage, an uneasy stalemate persisted, characterised by periodic clashes of uniformed bodies on battlefields of varying sizes and a constant rumbling of 'sub-threshold' irregular warfare.



Erected in 1899 to mark 1,000 years since the monarch's death, this statue of King Alfred the Great was designed by Hamo Thornycroft and is one of Winchester's most recognisable landmarks.

From 1808 to 1813 a series of marches, counter-marches, battles and sieges saw territory change hands repeatedly as the opposing sides (a British-Portuguese army now allied with Spain against a widely-spread French Army) sought resolution. Central to Wellington's operational plan was the evasion of set-piece battles with multiple French Corps that had been able to join together to concentrate their forces. This tactic of evasion was exemplified, in 1810, by a long campaign of withdrawal by manoeuvre and carefully chosen battle sites (such as at Bussaco in September of that year) until, over a landscape deliberately stripped of resources, Wellington retired with his army behind the pre-prepared defensive lines of Torres Vedras covering the Lisbon peninsula. Refusing battle, Wellington built up his own strength while his immediate opponent (Massena) watched his ill-supplied troops dwindle in strength. Meanwhile the other French Corps in the Peninsula were pinned in place by Spanish military action, indigenous guerrilla action, and internecine squabbling (all of which saw

"Like Alfred before him, Wellington had ignored the pressures of allies, his own government, and some of his own subordinates, and had accepted as a necessary evil the suffering of the local population, in favour of a campaign plan of patient wisdom."

considerable resonance with the situation in Ukraine today). Even after beating the bedraggled Army of Massena back out of Portugal, winning the battle of Salamanca and occupying Madrid, in 1812, Wellington still withdrew (to the frustration of both London and his allies) rather than confront the combined forces of the French Army when the French marshals did manage to concentrate for effect.

Only once the strategic tide of war had turned (and Napoleon had suffered

the great set-back of the Moscow campaign of 1812) did Wellington turn fully to the offensive. Like Alfred before him, Wellington had ignored the pressures of allies, his own government, and some of his own subordinates, and had accepted as a necessary evil the suffering of the local population, in favour of a campaign plan of patient wisdom. He had bided his time, selected his battles carefully, avoided French strength, built up his resources, preserved his own force, forced attrition on his enemies, and only gone onto the operational offensive for strategic effect when he was confident that the scales had tipped irrevocably in his favour. (While considering the Napoleonic Wars, it is worth adding that a study of the Russian tactics of 1812 would show a very different, but in many ways complementary, campaign of evasion, carefully selected pitched battles for advantage, scorched earth, obstruction by the indigenous population, irregular warfare, alliance making and alliance breaking, attrition (by weather and the force of arms) and patient circumvention, before the switch to a controlled offensive.)

One hundred years after the fall of Napoleon, Europe once again found itself engulfed in conflict in the trenches of the First World War with a stalemate on a continental scale stretching from the Channel coast to the Swiss Alps. World War One is, perhaps, history's most extreme example of a tactical, operational and strategic stalemate in war. It is no surprise, therefore, that the 2018 Army Staff Ride, which combined the two twin objectives of commemoration and learning, examined, a further 100 years on, what had brought about the breaking of that seemingly indissoluble stalemate.⁹

Late March and early April 1918 saw the initial breaking of the deadlock by the German offensives of Operation Michael and then Georgette – the opening moves of the so-called Kaiserschlacht or 'The Ludendorff Offensive' as it is also known. The considerable and immediate successes of this offensive, which broke through the Allied lines and sent them reeling back kilometre after kilometre, losing over 250,000 men, was characterised by surprise, confusion and the use of novel tactics. Forces were built up, in the old way, and artillery preparation used, but when the attacks were launched instead of the massed waves 'biting and holding' ground the Germans came forward in stormtrooper groups, punching holes in the Allied lines, immediately exploiting into depth, disrupting



⁹Post-exercise Reports and Exploitation Reports from ASR 2018 are available from the Historical Branch (Army) and offer detailed insights into this subject.

A British anti-aircraft gun – recovered from the desert battlefield – on display at the museum in El Alamein.

Courtesy of Soldier Magazine, © Crown copyright



and confusing rear areas and sowing chaos, disrupting command and control and choking off logistic resupply, before pressing on relentlessly. Follow-on units, in greater strength and concentration, were tasked with engaging the now disrupted, disordered and ill-supplied former Allied front line. The operational objectives were kept flexible, and successes were ruthlessly reinforced and exploited. New objectives were set daily as the battle ebbed and flowed. In many ways, the Spring Offensive of 1918 represented the birth of the Blitzkrieg tactics that so characterised 1939 and 1940. The German offensive was, however, a victim of its own success.

The speed with which the Allies had fallen back left the advancing Germans thinly spread and over-extended. They, too, had suffered heavy casualties and attrition (both in the preceding three years and in the offensives of Spring 1918 themselves). The Germans had advanced as far as the Meuse, but the Allies had held on. The offensive had considerable success – but it was not operationally, let alone strategically, conclusive. And America had entered the war. The now over-extended and depleted Germans were set ripe for a counter offensive. As summer turned to autumn the reinforced Allied armies switched from the defence to the offence. Across the Western front, but especially in the American sector of Meuse-Argonne, the Allies pushed the tide of war back and struck deeper and deeper into the German army. The raw US troops made many of the mistakes that their French and British predecessors had made, but the weight of numbers and resources, the lessons swiftly learned by all of the Allies from the German tactics, and the combined and concentrated

efforts of all of the Allied protagonists across the breadth of the Front soon told on the over-extended and under-resourced German Army.

Ironically, one of the principal factors in bringing about the defeat of Germany on the Western Front was the involuntary ceding of ground by the allies as a result of Operations Michael and Georgette. Until that point, the political imperative to fight for every centimetre of 'the sacred soil of France' had led to a stubborn refusal to cede terrain, even if it meant sitting in waterlogged low ground that offered no tactical advantage, overlooked by well-sited enemy positions. The collapse brought about by the early successes of the Germans had forced the Allies to seek positions of better tactical sense to re-position for advantage. Ground-centric tactical restrictions on the Allied generals, imposed upon them by politics and policies rather than by military judgement, were, by necessity, cast aside by the German advance.

The stalemate of the Western Front can be said to have been broken, and ultimately resolved to strategic conclusion, therefore, through a combination of deliberate and serendipitous factors. The Germans began the breakthrough with the use of novel (stormtrooper) tactics, achieving immediate tactical

"The Second Battle of El Alamein broke the stalemate in the North African deserts and turned the tide irrevocably in favour of the Allies. Over the previous two years the war had flowed back and forth across North Africa, with considerable movement and manoeuvre, but, nevertheless, had developed into something of a stalemate as each side secured tactical advantage and then over-extended only to be beaten back by the other."

advantage and surprise. They then, inadvertently, over-extended themselves while suffering unrecoverable attrition of their own, before they had managed to convert considerable tactical success into operational or strategic conclusion. The Allies, inadvertently, were forced to re-examine their approach to the tactical selection and use of ground; were uncharacteristically swift in their learning from (and re-setting to counter and exploit) German novel tactics; and, despite taking considerable casualties themselves, were able to over-match the Germans in personnel and capability terms through the arrival, in strength, of the American contingent such that the balance of forces was tipped irrevocably in their favour.

In late October and early November 1942, the Second Battle of El Alamein broke the stalemate in the North African deserts and turned the tide irrevocably in favour of the Allies. Over the previous two years the war had flowed back and forth across North Africa, with considerable movement and manoeuvre, but, nevertheless, had developed into something of a stalemate as each side secured tactical advantage and then over-extended only to be beaten back by the other. Tactical successes were not developing into operational successes. With a near balance of capability and resource, each side was relying upon out-matching the other tactically in order to generate localised breakthroughs, which were then rapidly exploited to the point of exhaustion, without ever achieving the operational defeat of their respective opponents. Distance and a lack of resources (in men, ammunition, equipment and logistics) were hampering both sides' ability to bring the campaign to a favourable conclusion.¹⁰ By July the lines had gone firm around El Alamein with the impassable Qattara Depression and the extensive use of

¹⁰ Professor Niall Barr's excellent book on this subject offers a full explanation of this campaign: Niall Barr; *The Pendulum of War*; ISBN 0-7126-6827-6



"The combined economic and industrial capacity of those who stood against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact was such that all that was required to 'win the Cold War' was to hold the Warsaw Pact in a stand-off. By maintaining a state of stalemate, the West ensured that the economic and industrial capacity of the Soviet Union and its allies became so overwhelmed by the need to maintain an equilibrium of forces in being that the stalemate itself caused the internal collapse of the state."

minefields bringing the ebb and flow of war to a standstill.

The newly-appointed Lieutenant General Montgomery, perhaps scarred by his First World War experiences, was a firm believer in what he called delivering 'colossal cracks' to the enemy. By this he meant not just delivering superior tactical manoeuvre, but backing that manoeuvre up with an overmatch in capability such that he was likely to defeat the enemy through strength and numbers as well as retaining the strength in depth to exploit tactical successes. As the lines solidified around El Alamein in July, after the inconclusive first battle, Montgomery used the tactical pause to build up the balance of forces, while Allied air and sea activity in the Mediterranean made it very difficult for the Afrika Korps to be resupplied and reinforced with commensurate strength. By mid-October intelligence revealed to the Allies that the Afrika Korps, with just over 116,000 men and 547 tanks, had only three days of combat supplies remaining to them (especially in terms of fuel). By contrast, Montgomery had used the stalemate to build the 8th Army up to 195,000 men, over 1,000 tanks and had stockpiled 16 days of combat supplies. He judged that the time was ripe to attempt a tactical breakthrough, not just because he had capability overmatch on the battlefield, but because he was likely to have the capacity to exploit any success he achieved at precisely the point when his opposite number, Rommel, would be least likely to be able to react effectively in depth. Montgomery's 'colossal crack' at El Alamein saw tactical breakthrough as a means to an end (a properly-resourced end), not as an end in itself.

Finally, in this section of the article, history has repeatedly shown us that it is perfectly possible to tip the scales in one's favour by bringing the enemy to a point where they are no longer able to compete and, in various ways, break the stalemate through their own submission. Paulus's 6th Army at

Stalingrad represented the high-water mark of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, but by attrition and isolation, and considerable Soviet sacrifice, the Red Army was able to wear down the German war machine and, in particular the 6th Army in isolation, such that the collapse of the German effort in Stalingrad was unavoidable and, arguably, as a result the wider effort throughout the Eastern Front became inevitably unsustainable. The Soviets' ruthless preparedness to sacrifice vast numbers of their own personnel, and their capacity so to do, outweighed the Germans' capacity in this respect.

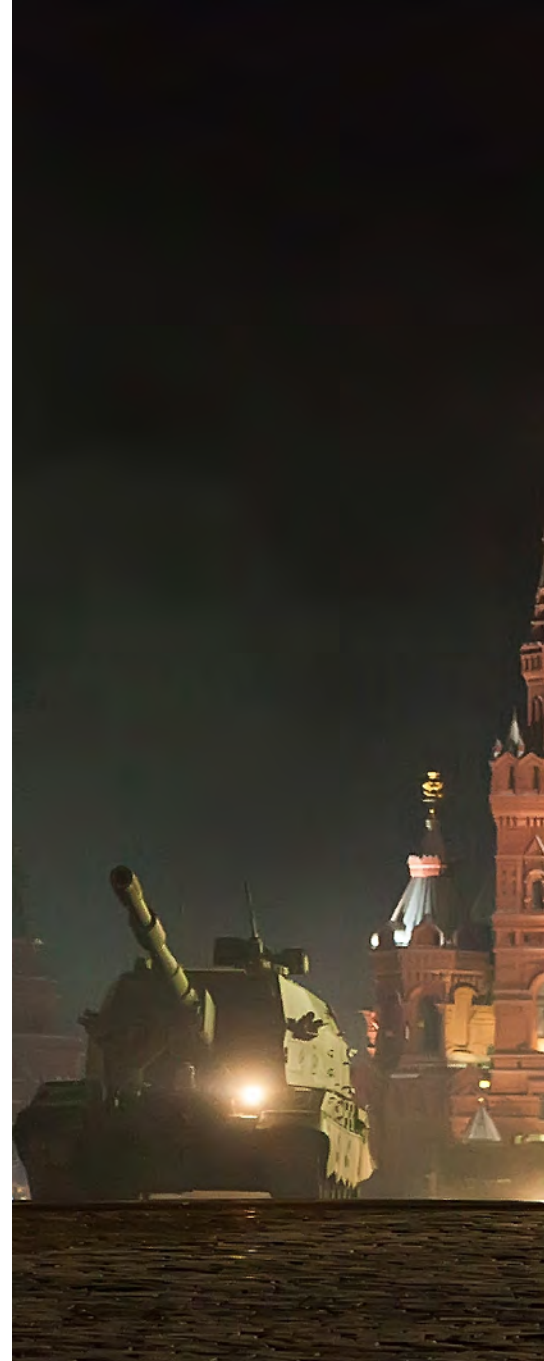
The events of 1810 to 1812, both in the Iberian Peninsula and in Russia, saw the withdrawal from the point of stalemate by a French force that was worn down through a combination of casualties, logistic shortcomings and the effects of terrain and climate. Massena withdrew from the lines of Torres Vedras not because he had been defeated in combat, but because he realised that he couldn't win by combat and that his situation would only deteriorate if he remained engaged. Napoleon fell back from Moscow having made precisely the same calculation.

It is a sustainable argument to suggest that, on a global strategic level, the Cold War was won by the West by precisely these tactics, but on a grand scale. The combined economic and industrial capacity of those who stood against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact was such that all that was required to 'win the Cold War' was to hold the Warsaw Pact in a stand-off. By maintaining a state of stalemate, the West ensured that the economic and industrial capacity of the Soviet Union and its allies became so overwhelmed by the need to maintain an equilibrium of forces in being that the stalemate itself caused the internal collapse of the state. In effect, the Cold War represented 40 years of stalemate and attrition on a patient and grand scale, coming to an end only when one side was no longer able to find the capacity to maintain the stalemate.

"Not every war need be fought until one side collapses. When the motives and tensions of

*war are slight we can imagine that the very faintest prospect of defeat might be enough to cause one side to yield. If from the very start the other side feels that this is probable, it will obviously concentrate on bringing about this probability rather than take the long way round and totally defeat the enemy."*¹¹

In short, therefore, history shows us that stalemates, such as we see in Ukraine at the time of writing, are a common occurrence in war, and can be broken through: brokered or imposed solutions from outside the parties in conflict (with a long list of caveats and cautions); or, attrition and denial of the opponent while gathering one's own resources; or, the use of novel or superior tactics; or, the capacity, capability and resources to exploit tactical success through to operational goals for strategic effect; or, the capacity to absorb attrition oneself while inflicting such attrition on one's opponent that they become unable to maintain the stalemate



¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz; *On War*; edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret; Princeton UP 1976; 91



and withdraw from it. Or by a combination of some or all of the above.

A combination of all of the above?

In this respect, the CHACR book *Winning Wars* offers a wide-ranging selection of case studies that consider the possibilities open to those seeking to turn tactical and operational successes into favourable strategic outcomes.¹² Elsewhere, models can be found that offer frameworks for 'conflict transformation'. One such model, that might be instructive, is offered by Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall's work on *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*.¹³ Although developed with a mind to peace-building, the major points concern the how of changing a conflict situation to

one's advantage, and thus are as readily applied to the breaking of military deadlocks. Furthermore, their thoughts include nuances of many of the observations made above. In a less idealistic world, but certainly a more realistic one, the authors' general ideas on conflict resolution, in particular these 'transformations', are relevant to an analysis of military stalemates.

A brief summary of this framework displays the range of options available. Firstly though, there are a number of obstacles to conflict resolution that must be recognised. These primarily include, but are not limited to:

- the original sources of conflict;
- economic destruction increasing the likelihood of future conflict; and
- groups who directly benefit from the continuation of conflict (leaders closely

identified with a warring party, war profiteers, etc.).

These three factors clearly apply when seeking resolution in Ukraine and, their work suggests, dealing with these issues is a prerequisite for long-term conflict resolution. A brief look at the case study of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) shows that addressing these issues can certainly contribute effectively to a wider strategy.

Following on from this, they suggest, there exists a range of potential 'transformations' in conflict that can help change the situation and end conflict. The relevance for stalemates comes in how these transformations can change a situation. If taken advantage of correctly, this change could very well entail the breaking of a military deadlock, as the Sri Lankan government did so effectively from 2006. The authors outline five areas/levels of 'transformation' as the main body of their framework:

¹²Matthias Strohn (Ed); *Winning Wars*; ISBN 978-1-95271-500-6

¹³Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall; *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*; ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-8722-3



● **Context transformation:** global, regional and local issues beyond the conflict at hand often have a huge impact. Change or continuation in these contexts can be critical to the protraction of conflict/stalemates.

● **Structural transformation:** a conflict structure is comprised of the set of actors involved and their relationships. Changing these relationships, for example through the empowerment of a weaker party, fundamentally changes the conflict and opens up opportunities to break deadlocks.

● **Actor transformation:** Parties to a conflict can redefine their directions and goals and adopt new perspectives and strategies. In doing so – by changing the way in which they approach the conflict – there may be scope for solutions that were previously unavailable.

● **Issue transformation:** Conflicts are defined by the competing views of parties on crucial issues. When these issues, or perspectives on them, change, so too does

the conflict that they created; and

● **Personal transformation:** the concession of key adversarial leaders and personnel to settlement. Regarding military stalemates, this may take the form, as it did in Sri Lanka, of defection.

Finally, the authors detail a number of conditions for resolution that play into one of more of these transformations. The most relevant of these regarding the breaking of stalemates would include:

- Reduction in capacity or willingness of external powers to support the parties in conflict.
- Willingness of the parties to consider negotiation.
- Reduced asymmetry of power or capability (or indeed a reversing of asymmetry of power or capability).

Achieving these conditions, as Sri Lanka did against the Tigers, moulds a situation to one's

advantage, hopefully to the point that a stalemate can be broken.

During Eelam War IV, as opposed to their stance in the first phases of the conflict, the Sri Lankan government took advantage of all five of the 'conflict transformations' in some capacity. As a result, they overcame the obstacles to resolution and began to meet the relevant conditions, finally securing complete victory after over two decades of consistent failure. Of critical importance to the Sri Lankan government was its self-imposed 'actor transformation'. As a potential means for breaking deadlocks, this is perhaps the only one that can be fully controlled. By redefining and clarifying their objectives, the Sri Lankans also redefined their military situation and found a way out of the 22-year stalemate. By instigating first 'actor' and then 'structural' and 'issue' transformations, and aided by unplanned 'context' and 'personal' transformations, the Sri Lankan government achieved the breaking of their deadlock against the LTTE, successfully reformulating its goals in the face of adversity until it found a path to victory. Placed within Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall's framework and insights, this case study offers some significant



"The post-9/11 international counter-terrorism campaign – played right into Sri Lanka's hands. It brought America, Canada and the European Union onside, who contributed by disrupting Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam arms procurement, sharing intelligence, and the supply of a naval command and control system. All this created a 'structural transformation' in the conflict, where, after years of being on the back foot, Sri Lanka used these assets to empower itself both militarily and across the board."

conditions, and goals, and resetting them if expedient or necessary, is a powerful enabler – whether in limited conflict or in general war.

A second lesson that the campaign against the LTTE teaches us is the importance of a grand strategy – the employment of all the levers of power (diplomatic, information, military and economic) in the pursuit of a common goal.

Where previously the Sri Lankan government had been solely pursuing military strategies, 2006's 'actor transformation' saw a shift to a nation-wide approach to warfare.

Four per cent of gross domestic product was dedicated to defence, the armed forces budget was increased by 40 per cent, and lines of credit for arms purchases and oil were extended from Iran, Libya, Russia and Pakistan.

A \$1 billion loan from China supported not just military expansion but internal development that brought the population onside. Although a massive financial pressure, anti-poverty projects reduced the impact of war on the population and created active public support. This in turn boosted military recruitment to 3,000 new soldiers per month by late 2008. The armed forces were enlarged to such an extent as to catch up with and then overtake the LTTE. Diplomatically, the government isolated the LTTE from its international support, getting it banned in 32 countries. Critically, a global 'context transformation' – the post-9/11 international counter-terrorism campaign – played right into Sri Lanka's hands. It brought America, Canada and the European Union onside, who contributed by disrupting LTTE arms procurement, sharing intelligence, and the supply of a naval command and control system. All this created a 'structural transformation' in the conflict, where, after years of being on the back foot, Sri Lanka used these assets to empower itself both militarily and across the board, not just overcoming the asymmetrical balance of power but flipping it the other way. If a country, like Ukraine, finds itself overmatched despite putting its economy onto an existential war footing, the requisite strategic depth of operational capability that is needed to tip the balance on the battlefield in order to achieve tactical and, vitally thereafter,

operational successes, can still be rapidly achieved if willing partners provide timely and appropriate assistance.

A final lesson to be taken from Sri Lanka's campaign against the LTTE is the still-crucial place of an astute military strategy subordinate to a greater grand strategy. In this case, the military services remained critical to the pursuit of national objectives, and were the most important lever of power when it came to breaking the stalemate. In the classic manner, a military strategy that counters an opponent's strength while exploiting their weaknesses is necessary in order to be able to overcome an adversary's armed forces and thus break a deadlock. In the case of the LTTE, the major weakness was a lack of manpower, a situation exacerbated in 2004 by an unexpected 'personal transformation' when LTTE Colonel Karuna defected with 6,000 Tamils. In stark contrast, Sri Lanka had massively enlarged armed forces as a result of its new grand strategy, enabling 'defence-in-depth' alongside a Civil Defence Force while also attacking the LTTE strongholds in the north and east. The numerical advantage was used to great effect, attacking on multiple fronts to overload and tie down the LTTE fighters. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka also stepped up expansion of its Special Forces, who worked behind enemy lines to provide intelligence and remove high-value targets. This exploited another LTTE weakness: a reliance on an inflexible and hierarchical command system. Exploitable tactical success in Ukraine will require the careful targeting of areas of localised or specific imbalance, reinforced by superior specific capabilities concentrated for effect (Leopard II tanks for example?) to guide the decisions on tactical efforts. Thereafter, a policy of rapid and well-resourced exploitation is the course to turn tactical successes into favourable operational outcomes.

Overall, the combination of these three lessons – selection of an appropriate objective, a nation-wide grand strategy (and commensurate investment of resource), and an optimised subordinate military strategy – led to the downfall of the LTTE. Whereas

empirical insights of its own regarding the specifics of releasing a military stalemate.

The first lesson to be drawn from Sri Lanka's handling of the LTTE is the importance of setting an appropriate strategic objective. It was actually the LTTE that prompted Sri Lanka's strategic recalibration in this regard, deliberately ending a ceasefire in 2006. The result was the Sri Lankan government initiating a complete 'actor transformation' of itself, shifting its two-decade strategy of negotiation to one of annihilation. In this fashion, Sri Lanka redrew its strategic map and redefined its objectives, abandoning negotiations that had consistently fallen apart in favour of an all-encompassing campaign that targeted the LTTE's weaknesses while negating their strengths. In doing so, they created an 'issue transformation'. The problem was no longer finding a middle ground with the LTTE; it was how to destroy them for good. Sri Lanka had already achieved one condition for breaking the deadlock: they committed to annihilation, took negotiation off the table, and so provided themselves with the will to follow through to victory. In short, retaining a flexible mindset about one's own strategic restrictions,

the Sri Lankan government was able to flex its strategies in response to failure, when the LTTE's previously successful formula failed, they stuck and did not twist, losing their advantages and ultimately losing the war. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall's work, and the case study of the Sri Lankan government's response to the LTTE from 2006 onwards, has plenty of useful lessons for Ukraine.

A SUMMARY OF HISTORY'S LESSONS

An indecently simplified summary of the lessons explored above, gleaned from over two millennia of history, as they might pertain to the perceived imperative to break the stalemate in Ukraine, might be boiled down to the following bullet points:

- In the wider context, beware of externally brokered or imposed stalemate-breaking solutions. Such solutions, while laudable in their intent, have a habit of freezing stalemates in place in order to stop the bloodshed, rather than solving the underlying problems.
- Build a favourable strategic context through the isolation of your enemy and the generation of supportive friends and allies.
- Disrupt your opponent by imposing upon them simultaneous attention- and resource-demanding problems across their operational and strategic depths.
- If you do not immediately have the capability to prevail tactically, and, thereafter, to exploit operationally, do not attempt to go onto the offensive. Sit out the storm, build your own capacity and capabilities.
- Exploit all and every avenue to cause attrition on your opponents.
- When you recognise that a tipping point has been reached, in your favour, be ready to exploit it immediately and ruthlessly. Break the stalemate with the use of localised tactical successes, enabled by novel tactics, novel capabilities, and surprise in timing and locations.
- Hold sufficient reserves of capability such that the exploitation forces can, sustainably, follow up on tactical successes in order

¹⁴Although it is worth noting that there has been a history of almost universal scepticism concerning the chances of various leaders being brought to account, post-indictment, as the barriers of their native states were predicted as being impenetrable to international jurisdiction, yet The Hague has seen considerable success in this respect (Milosevic, Karadzic and Mladic spring immediately to mind, for example).

"Like Troy, the Russian establishment is surrounded by layers of 'walls' that may be penetrable through the use of 'Trojan horses' of many varieties."

both to consolidate them in depth and to pursue them to operational or campaign conclusions. Be flexible in where such exploitation opportunities may arise – breakthroughs are hard to predict and pre-plan.

- Be wise but flexible in how you manage your strategic goals as operational events unfold in your favour.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS: ACTIVE MEASURES AND TROJAN HORSES

If none of the foregoing lessons from history are deemed to be useful in the consideration of ways of breaking the Ukrainian stalemate, and to return to the opening paragraph of this *British Army Review*, then history, both recent and distant, offers us some rather more extreme, unconventional, or out-of-the-box alternative approaches.

Russia has long had a policy of operating against its competitors using so-called 'active measures', which include: cyber attack and disruption; attacks on critical infrastructure; assassination and attempted assassination; active interference with democratic processes; the use of disinformation and propaganda; the use of proxy forces (including in-country resistance or anti-establishment groups, organisations or movements); and the fomentation of civil unrest. Russia does not make a neat distinction between 'above-threshold' and 'sub-threshold' operations. Russia's opponents remain at a disadvantage if, for a combination of moral reasons and strategic calculation, they chose to tolerate Russia's 'active measures' while choosing to demure from the use of such measures themselves, or to eschew opportunities to operate aggressively 'below the threshold', whatever that 'threshold' might be considered to be. Ukraine and Ukraine's allies may choose to re-examine this approach.

Economic and other sanctions are, without doubt, having their effect. Increasing their

severity may well increase their effect. The indictment of Putin as a suspected war criminal has, without doubt, had an effect, regardless of whether or not he will ever be brought to account.¹⁴ Indicting those around

him, and potentially equally culpable, may have a useful effect. Like Troy, the Russian establishment is surrounded by layers of 'walls' that may be penetrable through the use of 'Trojan horses' of many varieties. This article is not the place to explore exactly how these 'Trojan horses' may be constructed or wheeled inside the Russian 'walls', but, getting concentrically closer to the walls of the Kremlin itself, avenues of exploration could include:

- Russia's most influential and powerful allies (China and India for example)

may, in very different ways, offer leverage at the strategic level.

- Russia's neighbouring states (and former component states of the Soviet Union) may offer a wide variety of 'Trojan horse' opportunities: Belarus; Moldova; Kazakhstan; Kirgizstan; Turkmenistan; Tajikistan; Uzbekistan; Armenia and Georgia.
- Kaliningrad, in its isolation and regional positioning, offers a range of vulnerabilities.

- The non-European population of Russia have shown an exploitable disquiet with the disproportionate casualty rates from the Ukrainian front.

- The wider Russian population, despite its nationalist pride and tendencies, and a diet of state-owned media, has fractures, fissures, and weaknesses.

- And then, inside the very walls of the Kremlin sits a fragile inner circle... in tension with the heart of the Wagner Group.



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