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**Title:** The German historian, Hans Delbruck, stated: 'The first natural principle of all strategy is to assemble one's forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it, and follow up the victory until the defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions'.

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**The German historian, Hans Delbruck, stated: 'The first natural principle of all strategy is to assemble one's forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it, and follow up the victory until the defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions'.**

**Analyse this assertion in the context of the readings and lectures that deal with Clausewitz, the First World War and Second World War with particular reference to the role of grand strategy.**

**By Piv Vanndy**

## **Introduction**

Although wars have happened for thousands and thousands years until now, many theorists and leaders have not yet agreed on the causes or purposes of wars. Some claimed that wars occurred due to the human violent instinct and the scarcity of human basic needs, while other argued that war was waged by threat, power and politics. World War I and World War II were the great examples to illustrate that war was involved with politics, and politics shaped what the theatre of war is, what the war looks like, how the war should be fought, and what military strategy and tactics should be employed to win the war.

Politics and military strategy should go together hand in hand in order to achieve political ends. Winning the battlefields does not mean that the victors obtain their political objectives. This victory is only the tactical victory and does not mean winning the enemy's heart. It is important to win in political level so that our enemy accept our will as the German historian, Hans Delbruck, stated: "The first natural principle of all strategy is to assemble one's forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it, and follow up the victory until the defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions." Therefore, to occupy the enemy or their countries effectively, battlefield is not the only main strategies to apply. It is only one of the effective ways of achieve the political ends.

This essay will analyse the above statement within three main elements: political level, strategic level and tactical level. It will also discuss these elements and argue that the role of grand strategy, which mainly refers to political level, is really essential to win war within the period of the First World War and the Second World War in the context of the readings and lectures that deal with Clausewitz, and follow by a conclusion.

First of all, the interpretation of the statement above is that not only the military strategy and tactics lead to defeat enemy and obtain political ends but also politics or the combination of all which refer as a grand strategy. Politics plays every important role in making national policy and grand strategy. It deals with people and politicians, and without their supports fight, war may not win because they can shape or change the character of war and determine the fortune of the war. As Clausewitz said “war is the continuation of policy by other means”<sup>1</sup> or war is an instrument of politics, achieving political aims is the fundamental goal of waging war. In the First World War, Britain and their allies realised that fighting war against Germany by using battlefield is not an effective means, so they had an idea of civil-military relations that can end war effectively. Their idea is that they wanted to see a revolution in Germany in order to lessen the people’s support of its military and to defeat Germany completely. Although the allies had economic strength during 1914-18, and they had good cooperation, coordination and joint command and plans, they would not win easily. Also, the allies knew that the definition of strategy before 1914 was no longer valid since force is not one of the means to win war. Additionally, the political ends of the allies is that they wanted to defeat Germany completely, only military, but not the whole state because they wanted Germany to balance power in Europe. Therefore, the politics or political objective is really influent on a grand strategy, and the grand strategy which reflects the relationship between generals, people, and politicians is a strength and means to achieve victory in war.

Secondly, in strategic level, Hans Delbruck’s assertion above imply that military strategy is the art of war in which the commander’s capability and strength to use his force to defeat the enemy. What Hans Delbruck had said: “the first natural principle of all strategy is to assemble one’s forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it...” really mentions to military strategy or military power. Similarly, Clausewitz said that “war is the use of force to compel the enemy to do our will”<sup>2</sup>, so war is about the fight, violence, destruction and especially the art of war or military strategy. Also, if what Keegan claimed that “war is not about politics, human needs and culture”<sup>3</sup> is right, so military power really matters in this case to win war. Military power in this case refers to military strategy which military commanders will employ to defeat their enemy. However, the great military commanders must know not only how to fight war effectively, how to engage the enemy and others in war and what the strength and weakness of themselves and their counterparts, but also know political circumstance and political objective. In 1915, Britain strategically tried to engage Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. & tr. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1993), 83-101, 731-737.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

<sup>3</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 3-7.

in war but Russian was not able to fight because they did not have enough weapon to support their army, so it waited for help from the United States. Britain knew that Germany at that time wanted war to happen outside Europe and desired to have a world war since it wanted to dominate the world, but the allies wanted war remaining in Europe. Therefore, the military strategy of both sides had to match with their grand strategy or policy. The Schliffen Plan, which was a grand strategy of Germany, failed because the politicians and military leaders in Germany did not realize that military strategy also required people's support, and this plan focus mainly on only military operation. Because military power relies on armed forces which are the contribution of people, winning people's will on both our side and enemy's side is also a key element before making military strategy, and this reflects Hans Delbruck's assertion in the last phrase "...follow up the victory until defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions."

Last but not least, Hans Delbruck's above declaration implies the significant role of grand strategy to win war. Tactical level, in particular tactics, can impact the grand strategy and may lead to the victory or failure. In the Second World War, Japan invaded China, South East Asia and other countries in the Pacific to get natural resources. It had superior military capability and tactics to these countries or regions, but they had no specific grand strategy of the post-war or post occupation of these countries. It had effective tactics and won the tactical level at first as the statement mentioned "to assemble one's forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it", but later it failed to follow up the political objective or political level. As in this quote "follow up the victory until defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions", Japan should remain in China for its desires of resources and convince people's will to support its occupation. It should not make any further invasions that soared the resistance because of the unacceptance of its military operation and occupation which led to its failure of the Second World War. Although Japan and the United States may have confrontation or tension between each other, the war between them was unlikely to occur soon because the grand strategy of the United States was 'Germany First'. Because Japanese military tactics was to attack Pearl Harbor, the war between Japan and the United States happened and shifted the grand strategy of the United States to focus more on war the Pacific. Similarly, Japan surprised attacked on the Austrian territory in Darwin lead Australia in war in Pacific and focus more on defending their own territory rather than supporting its allies. Not only Japan but also Germany had no grand strategy of the post-war. Most of their grand strategies focused on the military strategy and tactics. As a result, they were defeated by the allies especially the United States since the United States had its effective grand strategy which combined the political level, strategic level and tactical level. Therefore, tactics should abide by the military strategy and policy,

and tactical level is an important contribution to the grand strategy which dominates the whole theatre of war and lead to the victory.

## **Conclusion**

Although there have been many aspects that have been linked or discussed regarding with to war, the main point of this is about policy or grand strategy. The statement of Hans Delbruck: “The first natural principle of all strategy is to assemble one's forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it, and follow up the victory until the defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions”, implies the meaning that the purpose of war is not only to defeat the enemy's military but also to win people's will and to achieve other political objectives. The victory of the United States and its allies in both the First World War and the Second World War has reflected the effectiveness of their grand strategy and the important role of grand strategy before, during and after war as well as in peacetime. Therefore, grand strategy is the most essential elements to win war and achieve the political ends. This essay has already discussed the importance of grand strategy and other elements such as politics, military strategy and tactics which impact the grand strategy and the outcome of war. It also used the examples of the First World War and the Second World War to elaborate that war was not only about military strategy but also politics and grand strategy. Military leaders and politicians should realise that achieving political ends is the main goal of the grand strategy, the effective grand strategy should serve people's will both the victorious and the defeated sides.

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