

# **Strategy**

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**U.S. Marine Corps**

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
Headquarters United States Marine Corps  
Washington, D.C. 20350-3000

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CHANGE 1 to MCDP 1-1  
Strategy

1. This publication has been edited to ensure gender neutrality of all applicable and appropriate terms, except those terms governed by higher authority. No other content has been affected.
2. File this transmittal sheet in the front of this publication.

Reviewed and approved this date.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDANT OF THE  
MARINE CORPS

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert S. Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'R' and 'W'.

ROBERT S. WALSH  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration

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## FOREWORD

This publication is designed to give Marine leaders a solid, common understanding of the fundamental nature of military strategy that is inherent in each military action. Its intent is to give the reader the basic knowledge required to think “strategically,” that is, to be able to examine the particulars of any specific situation and understand the political and military factors behind the use of military force.

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-1 provides the foundation for thinking strategically. This foundation will enable Marines to better understand their roles in a particular situation and to consider the implications of their actions on the military strategy being employed and the political objectives that strategy is intended to achieve.

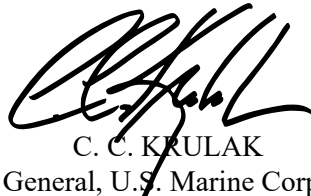
Just as it is important to appreciate what this publication is designed to do, it is equally important to understand what this publication does not seek to do. It does not attempt to provide a solution to current strategic problems, nor is it concerned with details of current American strategy. MCDP 1-1 does not assume that war and military strategy are exclusively a matter of international or interstate behavior, and the concepts discussed in it are

not limited to any particular *kind* of warfare or level of conflict. Nor does *Strategy* prescribe any particular strategy, any particular process for the making of strategy, or any specific techniques and procedures for handling military forces. It is meant to educate the mind of future commanders or, more accurately, to guide them in their self-education, not to accompany them to the battlefield.

Chapter 1 explores the complex nature of the strategic environment, including the relationship between war and politics and the key factors at work in any strategic situation. Chapter 2 discusses the essential elements of any strategy, the relationship of ends and means, and the interaction among political objectives, national strategy, and military strategy. Chapter 3 looks at a variety of strategies as they might be developed in different strategic situations. Chapter 4 synthesizes the concepts presented in the first three chapters by focusing on how strategy is made, who makes it, what moral criteria guide strategic decisions, and what pitfalls may occur in the making of strategy.

This publication is primarily for field grade officers. However, Marines at all levels require a broad perspective and an understanding of how the effects of their actions can influence the attainment of our national objectives. Furthermore, Marines of any rank or specialty can easily find themselves working for senior leaders with strategic responsibilities. Those leaders need subordinates who understand the strategic environment and can provide intelligent and insightful advice on the strategic situation. Therefore, as a

foundation for strategic thought, this publication should be read and understood by Marines at all levels of command both in the operating forces and the supporting establishment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. C. Krulak', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

C. C. KRULAK  
General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commandant of the Marine Corps

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# Strategy

## Introduction. The Study of Strategy

### Chapter 1. The Strategic Environment

The Nature of Politics and War—Further Defining War—The Nature of War-Making Political Entities—Strategic Constants and Norms—*The Physical Environment—National Character—War and the State—The Balance of Power Mechanism—The Trinity*

### Chapter 2. Strategy: Ends and Means

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### Chapter 3. Strategic Opposites

Defensive and Offensive Strategies—Symmetrical and Asymmetrical Strategies—Deterrence: Strategies of Reprisal or Denial—Standardized or Tailored Strategies—Strategy by Intent or by Default—Evaluating Opposing Strategies

### **Chapter 4. The Making of Strategy**

The Strategy-Making Process—*The Strategic Assessment*—*Political Objectives*—*Military Objectives and the Means to Achieve Them*—*Strategic Concepts*—Who Makes Strategy?—Just War—Strategy-Making Pitfalls—*Strategic Panaceas*—*Emphasizing Process Over Product*—*The Fait Accompli*—*Limited and Unlimited Wars*—*Paralysis and Recklessness*

### **Conclusion**

### **Notes**

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## Introduction

# The Study of Strategy

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*“The nation that draws too great a distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools.”<sup>1</sup>*

—Unknown



Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting*, stresses that war is fundamentally political in character and that war must serve policy. What matters ultimately in war is strategic success: attainment of our political aims and the protection of our national interests. History shows that national leaders, both political and military, who fail to understand this relationship sow the seeds for ultimate failure—even when their armed forces achieve initial battlefield success. Battlefield brilliance seldom rescues a bad strategy.

The United States Marine Corps is a key instrument in the execution of American national strategy. Marine expeditionary forces possess extraordinary strategic reach. As an expeditionary force-in-readiness, the Marine Corps has been consistently called upon to implement key elements of our national security strategy and its supporting national military strategy. While the Marine Corps is not a strategy-making organization in the sense of designing a national military strategy or even drafting strategies to fight particular wars, the effective execution of strategy requires an understanding of both its intent and its context. In order to carry out our responsibilities to the Nation, Marines must possess the strategic skills and understanding necessary to participate effectively in the strategic environment of the 21st century.