

Operational Art in the 21st century

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The term „Operative Führungskunst/Operational Art“ leaves some scope of interpretation just because of the wording, whether one investigates the German term which includes apart from the term art command as well, or the English expression, which only reflects art. Both expressions, however, include some certain myth consisting of something which goes beyond the learnable military expertise. The term „operational art“ generally could also indicate “military art”, “art of warfare” or something similar. The substance the term stands for, however, is essential, which basically has always had the same purpose during its long period of development. In the end it is the intellectual and comprehensive organisation of military acting for the purpose of achieving strategic goals as a part of an overall national effort. At the same time one must not lose sight of the political objective, and the best possible alignment with other fields of politics, like diplomacy or economy, has to create fields of synergy. The operationally leading commander will only be able to take the correct decisions if there is absolute perspicuity about the intentions of the military strategic and political levels. Only then can the military contribution take place purposefully and aligned with other measures. The necessity of the operational level, developed in history, deducted from the increasing complexity of warfare as well as from the separation of political and military command and control (the sovereign is no longer the general), will not only maintain its authority in future, but will be increasingly called for. The growing global instability, the throwback to „power politics“ with superpowers synergistically using all “instruments of power”, the simultaneous progressivity of non-governmental actors, migration at large scales, and global terrorism, as only some cases in point, require the synchronized exertion of all military means aligned with non-military contributions, in order to achieve the political and military strategic objectives. For this the operational command level is required, which investigates problems with their causes, free from the direct obligation of political consultation and alignment, as the creative and enabling connective link between military strategy and tactics, detecting possibilities of solution, and issuing implementation orders to the services. The tactical acting of armed forces will be able to support the achievement of political objectives only if this happens in alignment with the purpose of war stipulated by Clausewitz, i.e. in the current understanding by interoperation, efforts of all national elements to achieve an “end state”. Thus, following the guidelines of both the strategic and the military strategic levels, the most distinguished task of operational art in future will still be determining the “decisive battle” for the “purpose of war”, and establishing the necessary prerequisites so that it can be conducted by the tactical level by means of “encounters” in the best possible way.

