

What's the Matter with Being a Strategist?

Poyraz Gürson Ph.D.

"Leadership is a matter of intelligence, reliability, humaneness, courage and determination." Sun Tzu

The concept of "strategy", which is defined as "a principal plan to be followed in order to reach a goal" and corresponds to the Greek word "strategia", namely "art of generals", is used today in political, economic and many other areas even though it has been regarded as an art for the existing political power to manage its military forces in the military field, particularly in times of war for a long time. Thanks to the "strategy", a way of thinking, states identify existing and potential hazards, evaluate the severity of these hazards and gain the necessary opportunity and time to take countermeasures. Strategy is about the present and future. In other words, what you want to do and what you want to be are of great importance. The present and future can be shaped only with a solid strategy. Similarly, solid strategies require qualified strategists. At this point, in a country like Turkey located in a geographical area where conflicts and wars break out constantly, the presence of such strategists who will minimize the damage incurred by the current economic, political and military developments and ensure the country comes out better off from these developments is quite crucial. In the nuclear period following the Second World War, the strategists started to come out from among independent experts

who generally worked in an academic field, unlike the previous ones of the previous periods when the strategy acquired an interdisciplinary, rather than the military, nature. Indeed, while Henry Kissinger, one of the significant strategists of this period, is a historian, Herman Kahn was a physicist and Bernard Brodie was a political scientist. Just as notable personalities like Bernard Lewis, Zbigniew Brzezinski served the interests of their countries as significant strategists of this century in the West, we need strategists who will be able to deal with tough issues and think up strategies and policies as well. Development of military strategists is particularly important. A military strategist is a uniquely qualified individual in terms of the formulation and articulation of military strategy with his/her aptitude and experience. The military strategists advice the political authorities on what can or cannot be achieved in military terms while he/she turns policies of the politicians into military plans and actions. A military strategist knows how the potential enemies of his/her country plans a strategy, and has the basic information about the structures, functions and capabilities of the friendly and enemy troops. The military strategists have a sound background first at the tactical

and then operational level of the war in case of a war. A military strategist knows how to put people in action in troops in the war. He knows how to motivate people by understanding them. Indeed, a military strategist is aware that he does not manage chess pieces, but the actual units. He has a profound analysis and creative perspective in the development of an effective strategy of war. So, how is a military strategist with these capabilities trained? First of all, fully understanding the armed forces is a prerequisite for the military strategists. They must be fully cognizant of the capabilities and limitations of the military forces and various military units in general. Today's military map is not about a plain piece of paper; it has three dimensions: land, sea, and air. Therefore, in addition to their qualifications in their own professions, the military strategists must be competent in joint and combined operations as well. The military of the present day is a large organization with practically unavoidable elements of bureaucracy. The military strategists must recognize this fact. Self-development is an absolute must in the training of a military strategist. The tactical, technological, and organizational trainings that are the basis of the development of strategists must be well-sustained. However, above all,

the development of the capabilities of the strategists is an ongoing personal practice. Taking a look at the history, we can see that self-development is the key to the emergence of the best strategists. Alexander the Great learned about war with his father, Philip II of Macedon, on the battlefield. He received no formal military education. Yet, some people consider his insight as the combination of effective military power and statecraft. Napoleon did receive some formal technical training, but it was his enormous and voracious appetite for knowledge of military operations and knowledge that he gained almost entirely on his own that made him great. In this respect, it is fundamental that a military strategist has a strong and comprehensive knowledge of military history. A person who aspires to be a strategist must know the history of warfare well. He must know how the campaigns came up, how different units got engaged, and how the technological development affected the opportunities in wars. For the military strategist, history is a systematical thread rather than a chronological classification of events. In this respect, a military strategist trained in Turkey has a key role in identifying and implementing international strategies of our country. 