A strategic leadership theory of military effectiveness: General Matthew Ridgway and the revival of the US Eighth Army in the Korean War

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Introduction

Strategic leadership is widely understood to be something militaries need to have, but it is not often well defined. For some, strategic leadership emerges spontaneously along with the promotion to a certain rank (e.g. colonel), with the assumption that rank itself brings a strategic perspective. For others, strategic leadership is a lifelong pursuit that suggests a long list of ethical, emotional, physical, intellectual and social competencies. While the second approach is more compelling, comprehending such an amorphous and multifaceted concept is difficult; actually determining the real-world impact of strategic leadership is even more complex. In an effort to bring increased clarity to the concept of strategic leadership and better understand its practical importance, this essay develops a strategic leadership theory of military effectiveness.

All the core building blocks of this theory – strategy, leadership and military effectiveness – have been thoroughly studied in various academic and professional literatures. Despite the attention paid to these concepts, and the apparent relevance they have to one another, there is relatively little contemporary scholarship

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on the interaction between strategy, leadership and military effectiveness. In bringing these concepts together this essay makes four contributions. First, by suggesting an analytically useful definition of strategic leadership, this essay suggests a way of clearly articulating and testing the importance of strategic leadership in war. Not only will this approach enhance the power of our strategic analysis, it could also help improve the professional military education (PME) approach to developing strategic leaders by clarifying the concept and linking a specific approach to leadership and strategy with military performance. Second, engaging with both the study of strategy and the study of leadership provides a means for exploring the crucial human element in the creation and implementation of strategy. Strategy is made and implemented by leaders; it is not self-executing. Third, combining the study of leadership, strategy and military performance highlights the need for battlefield commanders to be good strategists, which is sometimes lost when scholarship and doctrine focuses too much on factors like the character and charisma of leaders. Fourth, studies of military effectiveness have not done enough to evaluate strategy or leadership as causal variables and studies by historians and practitioners have not operationalised leadership in a way that can be generalised.

The remainder of this essay is organised into four parts. The first section briefly surveys the current trends in the study of military effectiveness to suggest that leadership and strategy have not gotten the attention they deserve as plausible independent variables. The second section develops a strategic leadership theory of military effectiveness. The third section presents an exploratory case study analysis of the United Nations Command’s (UNC) military effectiveness after General Matthew B. Ridgway took over as combatant commander in December 1950. This is an initial test of the plausibility of the hypothesis that strategic leadership affects military effectiveness. Finally, the conclusion sums up the findings of this essay and suggests implications for future research.

Theories of military effectiveness

Military effectiveness is a way to measure the battlefield performance of a given military force. Millett, Murray and Watman offer a useful definition of military effectiveness and related terms:

Military effectiveness is the process by which armed forces convert resources into fighting power. A fully effective military is one that derives maximum combat power from the resources physically and politically available. Effectiveness thus incorporates some notion of efficiency. Combat power is the ability to inflict damage upon the enemy while limiting the damage that he can inflict in return.3

This description suggests military effectiveness measures the performance of a military organisation in terms of its ability to damage its opponent while limited its own damage. Military effectiveness has emerged as one of the most vibrant areas of research in security studies.

Since the publication of Stephen Biddle’s Military Power, the scholarship on military effectiveness has turned decisively towards the non-material attributes of armies. Tactical and operational efficiency, labelled as the ‘modern system’ by Biddle, has become the most popular explanation for military and combat effectiveness. The main trend in military effectiveness scholarship is expanding on and refining Biddle’s argument that military forces well-trained in the modern system of military tactics and operations are likely to be highly effective fighting forces.4 The emergent more expansive approach is that there are certain best ‘military organisational practices’ that, when implemented fully and correctly, produce maximally effective fighting forces.5 Some countries lack the resources or motivation to implement these best practices and therefore field less effective militaries, regardless of how many troops, tanks and planes they have.6 This set of factors can be labelled as the ‘skill’ determinates of combat effectiveness.7

5 Talmadge, The Dictator’s Army, p 1.
7 For the distinction between ‘skill and will’ see Brathwaite, ‘Effective in Battle,’ p 1.
Military practices are certainly crucial to combat effectiveness, but they do not seem to tell us much about combat motivation, or what Carl von Clausewitz called ‘moral strength’ and ‘moral factors’. Even if a force is highly capable of employing basic tactics and carrying out complex operations, will they do so with consistent motivation across armies and nations and circumstances? Can a force that is tactically mediocre but highly motivated defeat a force that is well-trained but has low motivation? These questions require shifting attention to the ‘will’ determinates of combat effectiveness. Will, or motivation to fight, is often viewed through the lens of morale and unit cohesion.

Strategy and leadership do not play a major part in recent scholarship on military effectiveness. To a certain degree, these factors fall in between the existing categories and might be assumed to be important but have not been studied with the depth and rigour of other factors. The remainder of this essay seeks to demonstrate the value of including strategic leadership in the study of military effectiveness alongside other theories of military effectiveness.

**Strategy and leadership**

This section has three parts. The first two sections define and discuss the scholarship on leadership and strategy. The final part of this section synthesises these concepts to develop a strategic leadership theory of military effectiveness.

**Leadership**

The connection between leadership and strategy and military effectiveness rests on the assertion that good leadership and good strategy cause good organisational performance. However, this could be seen as a tautological statement. The way leadership scholars address this issue is to study the variance between leadership types and organisational performance. If a scholar can define attributes of leadership and identify them independent of organisational performance, then rigorous analysis is possible. Traditional leadership studies focused on studying transactional leadership based on ‘leader-follower exchange relationships,

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setting goals, providing direction and support and reinforcement behaviours.'

New leadership studies focus on transformational or charismatic leadership based on ‘symbolic leader behaviour; visionary, inspirational messages; emotional feelings; ideological and moral values; individualized attention; and intellectual stimulation.’ The shift in approach was motivated by the perception that only small improvements were possible through transactional leadership, which fuelled the desire to create more efficacious leadership interventions. This hypothesis has been tested and quantitative studies suggest charismatic/transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on organisational performance.

The leadership literature identifies ways that leaders can shape the behaviours of followers. Two of the central means of affecting behaviour are through shaping values and identity. Leaders can inculcate certain values within an organisation and when these values are internalised, guide behaviour of followers. Leaders can also shape behaviour by activating a certain identity among followers. The goal is to create a collective or organisational identity that followers adopt and internalise. The assumption is that there are a variety of possible collective identities and it is the job of a leader to activate the one consistent with a certain vision of organisational performance. The leader must work within the overlapping space of plausible identities and ideal identities. Furthermore, the theory of ‘leader member exchange’ suggests that a relationship between the leader and follower that allows for mutual influence increases organisational performance. Studies carried out primarily in the business world support the proposition that charismatic–transformational leadership interventions have a statistically significant effect on the performance of organisations. Applying these leadership tenets to military strategy, a battlefield commander exhibiting


charismatic–transformational leadership can significantly increase the performance of her/his troops by increasing their motivation to fight. By inculcating values and an identity corresponding to the commander’s vision of organisational performance, a military leader can increase military effectiveness.

This discussion of charismatic–transformational leadership reinforces the importance of motivational leadership, while also suggesting scepticism about the importance of directional leadership, which is equated with the ‘old’ way of understanding leadership. By sidelining directional leadership, the ‘strategic’ part of strategic leadership loses its meaning. To say that providing direction to an organisation is a minor part of leadership or is relatively unimportant is tantamount to saying strategy is relatively unimportant in determining organisational performance. Some leadership scholars have noticed the overemphasis on motivation and mobilisation and subjected the charismatic–transformation model to strong criticism.

Other scholars argue that:

\[\text{effective organizational leadership is not just about exercising influence on an interpersonal level; effective leadership also depends on leader expertise and on the formulation and implementation of solutions to complex social (and task-oriented) problems.}\]

This ‘instrumental leadership’ approach emphasises the leadership task of creating effective solutions to organisational problems, suggesting a need to align leadership and strategy.

Some definitions of leadership do bring together charismatic–transformational and instrumental leadership and suggest links to strategy. For example, the armed forces of the United States, Australia and Great Britain have worked to create holistic definitions of leadership. The US Army defines leadership as ‘the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.’ The Australian Army defines leadership as ‘the art of influencing and directing people to achieve...”

17 Knippenberg and Sitkin, ‘Critical Assessment.’
willingly the team or organizational goal.”20 Both of these definitions have the elements of providing direction (instrumental leadership) and motivating an organisation (charismatic–transformational), and the US definition includes the useful concepts of providing purpose and improving the organisation (charismatic–transformational). The British Army approach is more in line with charismatic–transformational trends in leadership scholarship, emphasising values as the basis for effective leadership. Instead of a definition the British Army has a ‘leadership code’ describing values and behaviours of effective leaders.21 While all these definitions and descriptions are helpful in developing leaders, none of them give us a definition of strategic leadership.

In transitioning from a definition of leadership to one of strategic leadership, it makes sense to bring together the concepts of strategy and leadership. However, this is not how strategic leadership is usually defined. For example, in the US Army War College Strategic Leadership: Primer for Senior Leaders, the main concern is explaining how to manage larger organisations in more complex environments.22 However, when the highest echelons of military and civilian leadership call for creative and adaptive strategic leaders, it seems to be a call for more than just better managers. It seems to be a call for developing individuals with the ability to create innovative strategies to help military organisations respond effectively to an international context in flux.23 Consistent with this way of thinking, there is another way of defining strategic leadership that emphasises strategy and leadership.

Strategy and military strategy

Does strategy matter? Shelves of books on the topic suggest it does; however, few scholars have examined this question through social scientific inquiry. In his seminal 2000 article, Richard Betts subjects the ‘strategy matters’ hypothesis to a series of critiques and concludes that military strategy does matter, at least

under certain conditions. As evidence, Betts relies on logic and a series of empirical examples. His brief historical examples are generally convincing, but are nowhere near a systematic evaluation of whether military strategy causes or shapes the effectiveness of military organisations. Betts’s conclusions are buttressed by studies that have demonstrated the importance of strategy in specific cases.

This discussion begs the question: what is strategy? The answer is deceptively simple: ‘a strategy is a theory of success.’ A strategy is a causal explanation of how a given action or set of actions will cause success. Definitions of success will vary and most strategies will include multiple intervening variables and conditions, this gives the definition flexibility and allows broad applicability. Defining strategy as a theory of success encourages creative thinking while keeping the strategist rooted in the process of causal analysis; it brings assumptions to light and forces strategists to clarify exactly how they plan to cause the achievement of a goal or set of goals. Furthermore, this definition facilitates the comparison of strategies (Which strategy is the most convincing theory of success?) and allows for rigorous evaluation of a strategy before it is implemented (Is the theory internally consistent? Is it validated by empirical and theoretical knowledge?).

If a strategy, in the most general sense, is a theory of success, a military strategy is a theory of success in war or a theory of how to achieve the goals defined by political leaders, sometimes referred to as policy. An alternative and generally acceptable definition for military strategy is a theory of victory, though the concept of victory is contested and should be used with the understanding that victory is whatever the political leadership says it is. The main point of all strategy is to create a more advantageous position than would otherwise occur. In military strategy the point is to create a competitive advantage over your

30 Freedman, Strategy.
opponent, and thereby achieve success, as defined by policy. This approach to military strategy is preferable to other approaches because it is clear, concise, captures the distinctiveness of the concept, and provides a method of strategic analysis.\textsuperscript{31}

A final point worth noting is the significance of emphasising military strategy as a key determinate of outcomes in war. In recent years the study and practice of military strategy had been overtaken by the rise of the operational level of war. For some analysts, military strategy has practically ceased to exist, at least in the United States. Australian scholars Justin Kelly and Michael Brennan, argue that operational art ‘devoured strategy’ as the US military increasingly replaced military strategy with campaign planning, even at the highest level of analysis.\textsuperscript{32} Alternatively, Thomas Bruscino argues that that strategy devoured military strategy. More specifically, as military strategy morphed into strategy and encompassed more and more domains of life, military strategy was robbed of its fundamental meaning and purpose – ‘how we intend to win in a specific war or theatre of war.’\textsuperscript{33} For the purposes of this essay, there is no need to adjudicate between these two positions, but instead to note the relative dormancy of military strategy and the need to reinvigorate the study of military strategy to increase our understanding of why wars are won and lost.

By defining military strategy as a theory of how to cause success in war, it is possible to further develop the causal connection between military strategy and military effectiveness. To do so, one must describe a plausible causal connection between military strategy and battlefield performance. As scholars of strategy have noted repeatedly, good strategy creates power.\textsuperscript{34} Therefore the purpose of military strategy is to create combat power by realising some source of advantage rooted in discovering a strength in your organisation and/or a weakness in your opponent.\textsuperscript{35} A military strategy, once proven effective, can have a secondary effect on military effectiveness by increasing the confidence of the troops, which will, in turn, increase their motivation to fight.

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Strategic leadership

Strategic leadership is the process of creating a theory of success for an organisation and mobilising that organisation in the application of that theory. However, having a strategy, or theory of success, is not sufficient to cause increased performance; a leader must have an accurate theory of success if one hopes to increase performance. Moreover, a leader cannot be motivational in a general sense, instead, she must motivate followers in the manner required by the chosen strategy. Thus, strategic leadership can be done well or done poorly. Good strategic leadership is the creation of an accurate theory of success and sufficient mobilisation of followers for implementation of strategy. Applied to military strategy, effective strategic leadership causes increased combat power by identifying an accurate theory of success and sufficiently mobilising a military force in the application of that theory.

The scholarship on leadership and strategy suggests the following causal mechanisms linking strategic leadership to military effectiveness.

- First, a good military strategy generates combat power by creating an advantage through the discovery of new sources of relative strength.
- Second, successfully inculcating identity and values consistent with a commander’s vision of military performance generates combat power by increasing the morale, motivation and commitment to mission of the military force.
- Third, there are likely to be complementarities between strategy and motivation because a successful strategy can also shape organisational identity and increase confidence and therefore increase motivation.

Increased motivation may also open doors to new strategies or give the strategic leader greater flexibility in elaborating her strategy. Therefore, the primary role of the strategic leader on the battlefield is to develop an effective interlocking strategy–organisational–identity complex that maximises combat power in the commander’s military force.

The section below uses General Matthew B. Ridgway’s leadership intervention as commander of the US Eighth Army and UNC as a case study for investigating how leadership can create military effectiveness.
US Eighth Army in Korea: How Ridgway turned the tide

Estimate of the situation

On 26 December 1950, General Matthew Ridgway landed at Taegu, South Korea. He was the new commander of the Eighth Army, and de facto commander of the UNC, a force that had gone from the brink of victory to the brink of defeat in less than a month. This was the force that had rescued South Korea from the invading North Korean army (Korean People’s Army or KPA) and pushed those North Korean forces out of South Korea and north to the border with China at the Yalu River. But the triumph of victory had been short-lived as the Chinese People’s Volunteers Force (CPVF) attacked from across the Yalu River to push the UNC back to South Korea raising fears they could potentially be pushed off the peninsula.

Ridgway took over for General Walton Walker, who died in a traffic accident near Uijeongbu, South Korea. Walker was the commander of US forces in Korea, but General MacArthur was Commander-in-Chief of the UNC, based in Tokyo, Japan. In practice, this meant that General Walker had to gain MacArthur’s approval for operations and to a large extent, MacArthur micromanaged the war from Tokyo. However, this would not happen after Ridgway took command of the Eighth Army. In Ridgway’s first meeting with MacArthur after taking his new post, MacArthur said, ‘The Eighth Army is yours, Matt. Do what you think is best.’

MacArthur had low hopes for the Eighth Army and consistently and vociferously argued that the Eighth Army could only remain in the fight if it were massively reinforced and air attacks on Chinese territory began immediately. MacArthur did not believe that the Eighth Army could hold its own against the CPVF much less impose enough punishment to bring China to the negotiating table as Truman desired.

The UNC was at a numerical disadvantage. The CPVF had 400,000 troops, of which 230,000 were considered ‘frontline fighters.’ The KPA added 75,000 troops in 14 combat-effective divisions. The UNC could count on 270,000 combat troops, about half of which were South Korean. But the numerical disadvantage was a minor problem compared to the distinct lack of confidence and absence of fighting spirit among the UNC. Ridgway’s first impression could

37 Blair, Forgotten War, pp 590–591, pp 625–626; Roy E. Appleman, Ridgway Duels for Korea, Texas A&M University Press, College Station TX, 1990, p 92, p 140.
hardly have been worse: ‘There was a definite air of nervousness, of gloomy foreboding, of uncertainty, a spirit of apprehension as to what the future held. There was much ‘looking over the shoulder’ as the soldiers say…” The commander of the 8th Cavalry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Harold ‘Johnny’ Johnson recalled, ‘It was a…defeated army…a disintegrating army. It was an army not in retreat [but] in flight. It was something bordering on disgrace.’

**Ridgway’s Leadership Intervention**

Effective strategic leadership causes increased combat power by identifying an accurate strategy (theory of success) and mobilising a military force by inculcating an appropriate organisational identity to carry out that strategy. According to strategic leadership theory, an effective leader must, first, create an accurate theory of success that provides direction and appropriate goals for the organisation. A military leader must create a theory of how to use military force to achieve the goals of policy. Military strategy affects military effectiveness by creating combat power through the process of discovering new sources of power, identifying methods of better utilising known strengths, and identifying and exploiting weaknesses of the opponent. Second, leaders must develop and activate specific identities and values within an organisation that are consistent with the requirements of strategy. By inspiring greater commitment to the mission and increased motivation to fight and win, a leader can increase combat power of a military force.

Ridgway’s specific leadership challenge was to (1) develop a military strategy for the UNC that would achieve the political goal of bringing China to the negotiating table while avoiding escalation, and (2) mobilise the Eighth Army to implement that strategy. To make this work Ridgway had to generate increased combat power from approximately the same resources and manpower as his failed predecessor.

**Intervention 1: strategy**

The primary way a combatant commander provides direction is to develop and implement a military strategy in pursuit of political goals. If we define strategy as a theory of success, then it was Ridgway’s job to develop and implement a theory of how to preserve the Eighth Army as an effective fighting force, halt the Chinese advance and bring China to the negotiating table. He did this immediately.

Ridgway’s guidance from Washington was to hold the line against the CPVF and do what he could to encourage China to negotiate an end to the conflict. To this end, Ridgway decided to ‘shift from static defence to a limited offensive–defensive posture…He would begin with aggressive platoon- or company-sized

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39 Ridgway quoted in Blair, Forgotten War, p 571.
40 Quoted in Blair, Forgotten War, p 571. See also Millet, War for Korea, pp 372–373, pp 377–378.
patrols and build to battalion size or larger. In the process, he would commence killing the CCF [Chinese Communist Forces]. As noted below, he consistently emphasised the need to impose costs on the Chinese and North Korean forces through limited offensive and defensive manoeuvres. It did not matter much to Ridgway whether his troops were advancing or retreating, as long as they were punishing the enemy at a sustainable cost to themselves.

Ridgway’s main impact was on implementing a new military strategy to achieve the desired political effects and identifying a key advantage for his forces he would use to achieve those effects. In essence, he shifted from a military strategy of annihilation to one of coercion through denial and punishment. Under Walker/MacArthur the UNC strategy sought to destroy the enemy army in climactic battles of encirclement and when that did not work they retreated into a static defence. If this strategy was the only one available then it made sense for MacArthur to see the cause as lost. However, Ridgway saw another option. The logic of coercion by denial and punishment meant convincing the Chinese forces that victory was impossible by smashing their offensives and systematically decreasing their capacity to fight effectively. Instead of focusing on holding specific territory or seeking to impose an outright defeat on the Chinese forces, Ridgway’s goal was to wear down the enemy while preserving his forces on the Korean Peninsula. He noted the UNC advantage in firepower and saw that the effective use of firepower would be crucial for killing enemy soldiers using human wave tactics. This shift in goals and reorientation towards a new source of power set the stage for dramatically increased combat performance by the Eighth Army. But without a force willing to stand and fight long enough to bring US firepower to bear, the strategy would fail. This motivational element was the second part of Ridgway’s leadership intervention.

**Intervention 2: values and identity**

When Ridgway arrived, the Eighth Army was defined by a defeatist identity characterised by passivity, uncertainty, nervousness, fear, lack of confidence and avoidance of combat. The new commander had to reactivate the fighting identity of the Eighth Army and instil values of aggression, confidence and determination. Ridgway’s main effort was ‘putting backbone into Eighth Army.’ He believed the Eighth Army ‘needed to have its fighting spirit restored, to have pride in itself,

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41 Blair, Forgotten War, p 571.
43 Ridgway, The Korean War, p 108.
44 Blair, Forgotten War, p 580.
to feel confidence in its leadership, and have faith in its mission." To achieve
this, Ridgway toured the troop positions both to show himself to his troops and
take their measure. He was not encouraged by what he saw. He felt they lacked
'spirit,' they were 'a bewildered army, not sure of itself or its leaders, not sure what
they were doing there...'.

Ridgway did what he could to demonstrate and inculcate an aggressive fighting
spirit or warrior spirit. He wanted his troops to ‘fight and kill the enemy because
that was what real soldiers did. They fought for their comrades and their unit’s
reputation.' To inspire the will to fight, Ridgway visited all his battalions and:

made pep talks (his specialty), lectured commanders and their staffs
about their need of offensive spirit, and ensured that his army’s
material condition was as good as his logisticians could manage.
His aggressive spirit impressed the reporters that trailed after him,
and he fully appreciated that good news could create better morale,
along with hot meals and weapons that worked.

Ridgway knew that negative press was bad for morale and therefore requested a
public affairs officer to help change the narrative in the press. Lieutenant Colonel
James T. Quirk performed this duty well, as he promoted Ridgway and ‘helped
turn press attention to the Eighth Army’s new aggressiveness and heartened the
army and the public.'

Ridgway took dramatic action to infuse the Eighth Army with the will to fight. When the I Corps G-3 John R. Jeter gave his first briefing to Ridgway without
attack plans, he was relieved on the spot. Similarly, in a briefing with Oliver P.
Smith’s 1st Marine Division, Ridgway told Smith’s staff to throw away the maps
planning the withdrawal of the Eighth Army to Pusan and told them that the time
for retreat was over. According to the Marine 1st Division G-3, Ridgway ‘brought
a new fresh attitude, a new fresh breath of life to the whole Eighth Army.' He
also worked to ensure he had aggressive and energetic leaders at the corps and
division levels to reverse the ‘defeatist attitude’ of the Eighth Army.

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45 Ridgway, The Korean War, p 85.
46 Ridgway, The Korean War, p 86.
47 Millet, War for Korea, p 389.
48 Millet, War for Korea, p 389.
49 Millet, War for Korea, p 379.
50 Blair, Forgotten War, p 574.
51 Blair, Forgotten War, p 579.
52 Quoted in Blair, Forgotten War, p 579.
53 Blair, Forgotten War, p 571.
relieved four of the six division commanders, replaced one of his corps commanders, and several artillery commanders.\textsuperscript{54}

Since half of the strength of the Eighth Army were Korean, and they were in an even worse psychological state than the Americans, it was crucial for Ridgway to do what he could to shore up the Republic of Korea (ROK) battalions. His main effort was to re-establish trust by promising ROK President Syngman Rhee that the Americans would not abandon the ROK forces, and that if it was necessary to evacuate the peninsula the Americans would take the ROK government, army and dependents with them.\textsuperscript{55} He told Rhee that US forces were determined to stay in the fight and he intended to go on the offensive as soon as conditions permitted. Ridgway pledged in writing, ‘there is one single common destiny for this combined Allied Army. It will fight together and stay together whatever the future holds.’\textsuperscript{56}

Ridgway mobilised his forces by seeking to shift the identity and values of the Eighth Army and UNC through his rhetorical power, change in strategy and choice of subordinate leaders. The warrior identity was consistent with, and crucial for, the implementation of his strategy of coercion. His strategy would also help create a fighting spirit among his soldiers and marines and thereby increase combat power. The shift from attempting to smash the opposing force with major battlefield victories was replaced by the goal of imposing higher relative costs over time. UNC forces did not have to breakthrough and encircle the massive Chinese-North Korean force, it simply had to hold its ground, kill the enemy and complete limited offences when advantageous.

\textbf{Results 1: hold the line and ‘Bleed Red China White’}

A week after Ridgway arrived in South Korea, the CPVF began its ‘third offensive,’ crossing the 38th Parallel into South Korea on New Year’s Eve. The response by the Eighth Army suggests Ridgway’s initial efforts were only partially effective (he was there for only a week when the offensive began). Most of the ROK forces continued their pattern of panicked retreat in the face of Chinese attack. In particular, the retreat of the ROK First, Sixth, Second, and Fifth Divisions at the centre and east made the whole defensive line of the Eighth Army untenable. The ROK forces disintegrated in an evening assault by six CPVF divisions at the centre and five KPA divisions along the east coast of the peninsula.\textsuperscript{57} The best that can be said for the first engagement of the Eighth Army under Ridgway is that it completed

\textsuperscript{54} Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 581.
\textsuperscript{55} Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 575.
\textsuperscript{56} Ridgway, \textit{The Korean War}, p 263; see also Millet, \textit{War for Korea}, p 380.
\textsuperscript{57} Millet, \textit{War for Korea}, pp 383–384.
an organised retrograde operation that moved the entire force 60 miles from ‘Line B’, north of Seoul, to ‘Line D’, well to the south of Seoul.\textsuperscript{58}

After settling in a Line D, Ridgway worked in earnest to implement his new strategy and revive the fighting spirit of the Eighth Army. This was his opportunity to inspire his soldiers and marines and to restore the confidence of his officers. As soon as the Eighth Army settled in on ‘Line D,’ Ridgway ordered a reconnaissance in force north to regain contact with the CPVF. The first patrol was made up of the 27th Infantry with tanks from the 89th Tank Battalion and artillery from the 89th Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) and 90th FAB and led by Colonel John M. Michaelis, commander of the 27th Infantry. Ridgway told the task force, ‘We’re not going back anymore; we’re going to advance.’\textsuperscript{59} His order was to ‘search out the enemy and inflict maximum punishment on him.’\textsuperscript{60} Michaelis’s task force would advance north from the west end of Line D. The force found the CPVF at Suwon and positioned itself just to the south at Osan. The patrol was successful at finding the enemy and holding that force in place. More importantly it was a ‘morale builder’, putting the Eighth Army on the attack for the first time in a month.\textsuperscript{61}

In the meantime, Ridgway continued his work to build confidence. His standard order was to delay and degrade the enemy through defensive action and, when possible, employ local counterattacks. ‘[T]o initiate greater offensive action and bleed Red China white,’ the Eighth Army would ‘inflict maximum loss to the enemy’ and ‘achieve maximum delay’.\textsuperscript{62} According to one historian, Ridgway’s rhetorical efforts were successful and had an ‘electrifying impact’ on the soldiers and marines under his command.\textsuperscript{63} However, as of 11 January, Ridgway was writing to Washington that his ‘one overriding problem, dominating all others, is to achieve the spiritual awakening of the latent capabilities of this command.’\textsuperscript{64}

Results 2: attack and defend

By 14 January 1950, Ridgway was getting intelligence that the CPVF was beginning to mass to renew its offensive just north of Osan, near the salient held by Michaelis on the west side of the line. Ridgway saw this as an opportunity to destroy the CPVF regiments as they began to concentrate for an attack. I Corps

\textsuperscript{58} Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, pp 600–603.
\textsuperscript{59} Ridgway quoted in Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 605.
\textsuperscript{60} Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 606.
\textsuperscript{61} Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 606.
\textsuperscript{62} Ridgway quoted in Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 620.
\textsuperscript{63} Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 620; Appleman, \textit{Ridgway Duels for Korea}, p 148.
\textsuperscript{64} Blair, \textit{Forgotten War}, p 627.
was ordered to organise an armoured attack, Operation Wolfhound, to impose maximum damage on the CPVF and then withdraw to their previous position. Ridgway personally oversaw the planning of the operation and temporarily made his headquarters at I Corps to inspire the soldiers and invigorate the commander, General Frank ‘Shrimp’ Milburn. The total force would include about 6,000 soldiers, 150 tanks and 3 artillery battalions. It would be a complex combined arms operation with careful coordination and support. After engaging the CPVF concentration at Suwon, it became evident that the 27th Infantry and 89th Tank Battalion were in danger of being cut off and surrounded. Ridgway ordered all units involved in Operation Wolfhound to fall back to their original positions and prepare to defend a CPVF attack. But the attack never came. Despite the failure of Operation Wolfhound to do much damage to the CPVF, it did disrupt the attack and the ‘intangible benefits were remarkable,’ providing a ‘profound psychological uplift.’

The Eighth Army had moved north in force and survived contact without being overrun or losing cohesion. Furthermore, the CPVF declined to counterattack.

This operation contrasts markedly with the operations in north-east Korea in November 1950. Ridgway was cautiously aggressive, willing to attack, but also willing to draw back rather than risk encirclement.

General Joe Collins and Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, General Hoyt Vandenberg arrived in South Korea on 15 January 1950 to evaluate the situation and report back to Washington. This was Collins’ fourth trip so he had seen the Eighth Army before Ridgway arrived. He reported on the ‘improved spirit Ridgway had already imparted to his men.’ Collins saw a new optimism and confidence taking hold among the soldiers and marines. Both he and Vandenberg agreed that contrary to what MacArthur told them, the Eighth Army had the look and feel of an effective fighting force. Collins reported to Washington: ‘Eighth Army in good shape and improving daily under Ridgway’s leadership.’ Furthermore, ‘Ridgway alone was responsible’ for the improved morale and willingness to fight.

Aggressive probing of CPVF strength and disposition continued through January with most of the action taking place at the centre of the line, defended by X and IX Corps. Wonju changed hands and was recaptured on 19 January after a short but fierce engagement with KPA troops. Soon after, Task Force Johnson was formed around the 8th Cavalry supported by tanks from the 70th Tank

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65 Blair, Forgotten War, p 637; Appleman, Ridgway Duels, pp 149–154.
66 Blair, Forgotten War, p 637.
67 Quoted in Blair, Forgotten War, p 642.
68 Blair, Forgotten War, p 645; Appleman, Ridgway Duels, p 155.
69 Quoted in Blair, Forgotten War, p 646.
70 Quoted in Blair, Forgotten War, p 647; see also Millet, War for Korea, p 397.
Battalion. It moved north on a line to the west of Wonju and the east of Operation Wolfhound, beginning its mission on 22 January. Task Force Johnson was supported by a feint re-treading the path of Operation Wolfhound. Both the main operation and the feint failed to find any significant concentrations of CPVF or NKPA, but this was useful intelligence and demonstrated that the enemy forces were well north of Line D. More importantly, American regiments had effectively manoeuvred north without being set upon by Chinese forces. Again, Ridgway ordered operations that succeeded in building up the confidence in his soldiers.71

The preceding operations gave Ridgway the confidence to order I and IX Corps to carry out extensive reconnaissance-in-force operations at the division level on 25 January, codenamed Thunderbolt. On 24 January, Ridgway personally did aerial reconnaissance of the terrain that Americans would soon be moving into to ensure they were not heading into a trap. The 35th Infantry and 89th Tank Battalion of I Corps quickly captured Suwon, facing only light resistance. The Turkish Brigade achieved renown with a bayonet charge that dislodged CPVF from a hill near Suwon, encouraging Ridgway to issue an order for all troops to fix bayonets, symbolising the new fighting spirit and the desire to close with and kill the enemy. The 1st Cavalry Division of IX Corps attacked on a line to the east of I Corps and quickly ran into tough fighting with a CPVF regiment near Inchon. The offensive proceeded well enough for Ridgway to order the remainder of I and IX Corps into the fight. Both corps ran into CPVF regiments and gave battle without being overrun or pushed back.72 Operations proceeded so well that the I Corps pushed the CPVF across the Han River, considered a ‘notable, even electrifying achievement.’73

Eighth Army tactics and operations showed significant improvement in Operation Thunderbolt: ‘CPVF commanders reported that they found it difficult even at night to find vulnerable gaps and salient; the Eighth Army ground forward with massive fire support and halted for the night in tight, firepower-rich defensive positions.’74 Ridgway’s ‘determination to move north had a clear purpose: to kill Chinese and to weld the Eighth Army into a united, skilled and motivated force that could not be forced from Korea by the Chinese – North Korean armies.’75

Concurrent with the push to the Han, Ridgway sent a X Corps patrol both as a feint to enable Operation Thunderbolt and to develop intelligence about the disposition of CPVF in the centre of the line. It seemed likely that this would be the

72 Blair, Forgotten War, p 652, pp 654–664.
73 Blair, Forgotten War, p 682.
74 Millet, War for Korea, p 391.
75 Millet, War for Korea, pp 391–392.
area hit by the next Chinese offensive. The patrol, led by Colonel Paul Freeman and battalions from the 23rd Infantry Regiment found strong CPVF presence and their confrontation developed into the Battle of Twin Tunnels. In the day-long engagement, American and French forces held off vigorous Chinese assaults before forcing the CPVF to retreat under the deadly close air support by marine aircraft. The result of the battle was at least 1,200 Chinese dead and up to 5,000 Chinese casualties compared to 225 American casualties. Blair summarises the importance of this battle: ‘For the first time in the war an American Army force had not only repulsed but virtually annihilated a full CCF divisional attack.’ The success at Twin Tunnels demonstrated that UNC forces with adequate ammunition and preparation could hold firm against CPVF attacks long enough for their superior firepower to be fully utilised to defeat even a much a larger CPVF force.

The operations of late January showed significant improvement in both the moral and physical status of the Eighth Army. However, Ridgway had yet to experience a full offensive by the CPVF. This occurred on 11 February, with the beginning of the Chinese Fourth Offensive concentrated at the centre of the Eighth Army defensive line held by General Ned Almond’s X Corps. The American forces suffered major setbacks before regrouping to hold strongpoints at Chipyong-ni and Wonju. Both points suffered intense attacks with Chipyong-ni facing especially difficult fighting after being surrounded by the CPVF. Despite Almond’s early miscalculation, X Corps held the strongpoints on the line and with the help of excellent artillery work and close air support turned back the offensive. While Ridgway’s plan to bring I Corps across the Han to attack into the rear of advancing CPVF forces failed due to unexpected CPVF resistance and logistical problems, the overall outcome of the Fourth Offensive was a serious mauling of the CPVF, which retreated north of the 38th Parallel. Appleman views the battle at Chipyong-ni as the ‘turning point in the war’ and Ridgway as ‘its principle architect.’

The Korean War does not stop here, but the failure of the Fourth Chinese Offensive and the ensuing stalemate shows that the Eighth Army and UNC was able to hold its own against CPVF attacks and stage successful counter attacks. Subsequent UNC operations retook Seoul and pushed the Chinese-North Korean armies

76 Blair, Forgotten War, p 664–668; Millet, War for Korea, pp 400–401.
77 Blair, Forgotten War, p 668.
78 Millet, War for Korea, p 401.
79 Blair, Forgotten War, pp 687–712; Millet, War for Korea, pp 403–411.
80 Appleman, Ridgway Duels, p 580. Xiaobing Li argues that the real turning point was the defeat of the Fifth Offensive in spring of 1951, see Xiaobing Li, China’s Battle for Korea: The 1951 Spring Offensive, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2014. Regardless, without the victory against the Fourth Offensive, there would likely have been no Eighth Army left to defend against the Fifth Offensive, so Chipyong-ni remains a crucial point in the war.
back past the 38th Parallel. Both sides would continue to take and lose ground; however, after January of 1951 there was no longer a possibility that American forces could be evicted from the peninsula by force and the UNC won a decisive battle against the Chinese Fifth Offensive in spring 1951. Ridgway’s leadership intervention played a major part in the turn-around of the Eighth Army. In fall 1951, army officer and historian Roy E. Appleman surveyed hundreds of officers and soldiers under Ridgway’s command. He found:

Almost without exception, all who had any opinion at all (and most of them did) said that Ridgway made the difference in the outcome of the war—that he had prevented the Eighth Army from marching out of Korea, that he had singlehandedly given it a new spirit in two months after he assumed command and had turned it around to face the enemy and then driven the enemy north of South Korea. He led the American troops in retrieving the military honour of the United States.

Counterarguments
The analytical narrative described above provides considerable evidence in support of the argument that Ridgway’s strategic leadership significantly improved the military effectiveness of the Eighth Army in the winter of 1951. However, other factors certainly played a role in the increased success of the Eighth Army and UNC. First, the concepts of ‘loss of strength gradient’ and ‘culminating point of victory’ suggest the relative strength of Chinese and UN forces may have shifted over time. As Chinese forces got further from their home territory, their supply lines lengthened, battlefield fatigue increased and morale declined causing their combat power to diminish. Thus, while the overall balance of forces did not change much, Chinese effectiveness did decrease, giving the Americans and their allies a chance to regroup. While these factors played a role, it is not clear that Chinese forces suffered more from the movement down the Korean Peninsula than the American forces. For the Americans, they were not moving closer to their home territory and instead were moving closer to a humiliated total retreat from the peninsula. Supply lines were being shortened but as the UNC

81 Li, China’s Battle for Korea, p xvii.
82 Appleman, Ridgway Duels, p 148.
84 Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, (n 8) p 570.
85 Li, China’s Battle for Korea, p 53.
86 Both forces faced considerable difficulties by January 1951 when Ridgway arrived, see Millet, War for Korea, pp 377–383.
87 There was a widespread assumption that UN forces would evacuate the peninsula in January 1951, Appleman, Ridgway Duels, p 92, p 140.
retreated they lost large amounts of equipment, which could only be replaced slowly, if at all. The retreat down the peninsula did provide some time to regroup, but prior to Ridgway’s presence, the time to regroup was meaningless. Without Ridgway’s strategic leadership focusing on changing the identity of the Eighth Army and infusing them with a fighting spirit, it seems unlikely that a decline in Chinese combat power would have made much of a difference.

Second, perhaps it was not Ridgway’s strategic leadership that mattered, perhaps it was the operational leadership of Ridgway and his divisional commanders that made the difference. This hypothesis is in line with much of the literature on military effectiveness and there is some evidence to support this position. Much of what happened after Ridgway arrived could be categorised as improved execution of combined arms warfare. For example, Ridgway instructed his subordinate commanders to make better use of artillery and close air support, to go on the offence to the extent possible, and seek opportunities for disruptive attacks on CPVF formations. Thus, in a sense, perhaps Ridgway provided operational leadership rather than strategic leadership. This argument, while plausible, allows the operational level of war to devour strategy. As described in detail above, Ridgway did far more than instruct his division commanders to get back to the basics of combined arms operations. Furthermore, it is unlikely that simple operation directives would have made a difference. The Eighth Army had embraced an identity of failure and fear and had lost its sense of purpose. Ridgway analysed the political goals defined by the commander-in-chief and developed a theory of success to achieve those goals along with a complementary identity to enable the execution of his military strategy.

Conclusion

This brief case study of Matthew Ridgway’s leadership intervention in the Korean War demonstrates the value of the strategic leadership theory of military effectiveness. First, there is congruence between Ridgway’s new strategy and motivational efforts and significantly increased battlefield performance by the UNC forces. Second, the causal explanation of strategic leadership theory appears consistent with the facts of the case. Ridgway’s new strategy was effective and was tied directly to his efforts to change the identity and values of the UNC. To deny victory to the enemy and compel them to negotiate, Ridgway needed a military force willing to stand and fight with determination and aggression. He needed a force with fighting spirit. Ridgway created that fighting spirit and warrior identity

by explaining the basic purpose of why the US was in Korea and what that meant he needed from his troops. He also implemented his strategy in a way that slowly built the identity and values he needed. He ordered limited engagements that could provide small victories that would build the confidence of his forces. This style of leadership intervention shows that it is not enough to be a good strategist or motivator; a strategic leader must be both.

The Korean War case illustrates and provides support for a strategic leadership theory of military effectiveness. Strategic leadership is the process of creating a theory of success (strategy) for an organisation and mobilising that organisation in the execution of that theory. The concept of strategic leadership combines motivational and directional conceptualisations of leadership into a more comprehensive approach while focusing the fundamental importance of strategy. A strategic leader cannot just have unimpeachable character and exceptional motivational ability; a strategic leader must have the ability to formulate a good strategy that increases organisational effectiveness. In the military domain, a strategic leader must have an effective military strategy, or theory of how to achieve the political goals of the war established by the national leadership, while also infusing their military force with the collective values and identity that will enable successful execution of the military strategy.

There are two main implications of this research. First, the findings of this essay suggest students of military effectiveness may find it beneficial to include strategic leadership in future studies to analyse how military strategy (and even national strategy) affect military effectiveness. It is possible that in some cases, operational excellence is conditioned by, or even caused by, strategic leadership. Second, the concepts, theory and findings of this essay may be useful in PME programs. Strategic leadership is one of the core competencies PME systems are supposed to develop in its senior officers. As noted in the analysis above, strategic leadership is not always defined in a way that truly connects the competencies of strategy and leadership. Too often strategic leadership is seen as a set of relatively unfocused characteristics to embody, rather than as a practical skill set required for battlefield success. According to the theory proposed in this essay, PME programs that focus on teaching officers to develop good theories of battlefield success and educating them in the practice of shaping organisational values and identity will produce better strategic leaders.