



LYKKE'S LITTLE THREE-LEGGED STOOL (PART I)

By Arthur F Lykke, Jr., Mark Duckenfield and Jacqueline E. Whitt January 21, 2020
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Jacqueline Whitt: Hello, and welcome to A Better Peace the War Room podcast. Thanks for joining us for another episode. I'm **Jacqueline Whitt** the Editor-in-chief here at War Room and I must say I'm very excited to bring you today's program. I have two guests with me today. One is **Dr. Mark Duckenfield** the Chair of the Department of National Security and Strategy here at the U.S. Army War College and the second is **Colonel Retired Art Lykke** who was a longtime faculty member at the War College and who is now a fixture here in Carlisle. If you're familiar at all with the literature of strategy or strategic theory, there's a very good chance that you have encountered a simple drawing of a three-legged stool to depict strategy. Some have even called this the Lykke model. Well so, Art Lykke is here, the man himself and since he was just down the road from the War College, he was amenable to recording a podcast with us. We were just talking that this is sort of like a 21st-century version of a fireside chat perhaps. So, that's what we're after today. We've got the opportunity to talk with him and to see how things have changed and maybe what things have stayed the same to examine, if you will, perhaps the enduring nature of war and the changing character of war and strategy. Art, welcome to the War Room podcast.

Art Lykke: Thank you very much for having me.

JW: And Mark, welcome to you too.

Mark Duckenfield: Thank you.

JW: If you would, Art, tell us a little bit more about maybe how you came to be a faculty member at the U.S. Army War College.

AL: I went to West Point after graduation from high school in 1950 and then graduated from West Point in 1954, went into the field artillery and spent many years at Fort Sill, Oklahoma at the artillery school. I had some great assignments as far as teaching at West Point and stationed

in the Pentagon and one wonderful year with the wonderful people of Thailand which was great because they sent me to the Foreign Service Institute for 9 months, so I picked up enough of the language that it made it a really wonderful experience. I think you asked me how I got to the War College?

JW: Right.

AL: Okay. This is not a happy story because I have to tell you as a colonel stationed back in Hawaii at CACPAC headquarters, that's a major headquarters there for all the forces in all of the Pacific. I was coming up for a very important, not assignment, but selection and that was the Colonel Command List in the Army and I was hoping for it but did not get it okay. So, that was a strong indication. There was no indication for me to go on longer in the Army as far as higher rank. So, I sat down with my wife who was an Army brat, and we decided we liked the Army, we want to stay. We had wonderful experiences, great assignments, so we said we want to stay, so what do we want to do? I said to myself and my wife, I think it'd be nice to go back to the Army War College and teach for the rest of my 30-year career. There happened to be a visiting man from the Army, it's called the branch that selects you and so forth for the various assignments, and they come around talking about a preference statement. So, he came from Washington to Hawaii and was at Schofield Barracks, so I drove up to Schofield Barracks and sat down with him and he said to me, well you realize you did not make the command list. I said, yes, I realize.

JW: Yes, I'm aware [laughter]

AL: Yes, that's for sure [Laughter]. He said so what do you think you want to do? I said I want to stay in the Army. I would really like to go and teach at the Army War College. I think I could make a contribution there. This young major looked at me and says oh no, he says, we can't do that. The Army War College only takes top files. That was a crushing blow even coming from a major. So, I went back to my wife, I said it looks tough to get that. I took another course of action and that was contact a friend of mine, a classmate of mine from West Point who was stationed at the Army War College. I told him the story. I said I would really come, I think I can make a contribution. He talked to his boss who was a man called Colonel Harry Ball who later on wrote a wonderful history of the Army War College, and Colonel Ball said we want him here. Because most of my career had been spent in the Asia-pacific region, I was brought in as a regional expert. Now, I don't think it's even possible to come close to be an expert on almost one half of the earth's surface, but I had had a lot of time in the Asia-pacific region so that's why I came to the War College.

JW: So, we still look for regional expertise in our department.

AL: Of course.

JW: Mark, tell us a little bit about how that maybe has transpired now.

MD: Well, we have a regional program now where we offer a variety of regional courses across what we have created seven regions of the world and as you alluded to, the Army still looks at the Asia-pacific as one big region. But now with so many different people in different countries and interests there, it's quite a large survey course of quite a large area, but of course, there's a lot of interest in it. One thing I was interested in hearing more from you about because we've brought you up to the time you've arrived at the War College, if you could perhaps tell us how you came up with your famous metaphor of the stool.

AL: Okay, that's a long story but I'll make it as short as I can. When I got to the War College, I had only been here a few weeks and my boss, Colonel Harry Ball, called me in and said Art, I've been thinking about selecting you for the next Director of Military Strategy. I was a little bit surprised because I thought I was regionalist, but I had been to some good schools and a lot of time studying so I said I would like that very much. Then he also added as an afterthought he said, oh by the way, the commandant wants us to publish a book on military strategy. He just threw that in a little bit to kind of spice things up, I guess.

JW: I had a similar conversation with my department chair about three weeks after I arrived at the War College.

AL: Okay [Laughter].

JW: We might still be updating that book that you started.

AL: The first thing I did then was start going to the Army War College library and I took out every book and I read every book I could about the ancient strategists and so forth. I read Sun Tzu again who I like you very very much. Clausewitz and many many others from Great Britain. There was even an admiral at the Naval War College, Admiral Echoes, for about 25 years I think he was the guru of strategy at a Naval War College. He was very helpful. My boss also said I want you to go to all of the lectures at the War College and see of all these people who come here talking about strategy, if you can glean any problem areas and so forth. So, after studying about a year at the library and looking at all the lectures, and guess what? I did find some problems about the senior ranking lecturers coming into the War College, many of them purporting to talk about strategy. So, in my simple mind, I expected them all to be talking about the same things, but oh no, they were not. For instance, the people in the Navy, the top admirals we're saying what we need is a maritime strategy and that means we have to have 600 ships. And a few weeks later, there was a marine four-star who came in and said, I know you've heard about

the maritime strategy, but I want you to know that we also have an amphibious strategy and we need ships for that and so forth and so on. So, I went to my boss and said I'm seeing that there's a problem, there is no agreement on what strategy is, just a basic definition. He said okay, keep thinking, keep working. So, this took about a year of listening to lectures and going to the War College library. Now this is a strange part and please help me understand what happened here. I was living on post with my wife and two little daughters and went to bed one night and was kind of jarred by a dream I had. It was about two o'clock in the morning, and the dream consisted of two pictures. The first picture was of a three-legged stool. The stool was labeled "military strategy". On top of the stool was a symbol. It was an eagle; an American eagle and it was entitled "national security". There were three legs to the stool of course and they were labeled "objectives," "concepts" and "resources". Now I have to deviate here for a minute. Those were words that were in common use at the War College. But something came to me from my father who was an outstanding teacher and he had told me years before and constantly, Arthur, if you're going to be teaching something, make it as simple as you possibly can. Make it easy for the students to understand. He said a good teacher can teach anything. A good teacher can teach brain surgery, so try to make everything you teach as simple as possible. So, using those words of advice, I did change those three words objectives, concepts and resources to three easier words: ends, ways and means. And that's what has stuck.

JW: It has stuck. We still talk about ends, ways and means and we still fight over the definition of strategy. So, I think that that problem maybe hasn't gone away.

AL: That's right.

JW: But we still use the model and we still talk about ends, ways and means. You said there was a second picture?

AL: There was a second picture and that didn't change much except that the resources leg had been sawed off partially, which meant that the object on top, national security, was in danger of tumbling off then. Because the stool was tilted, and that was it. I woke up and in typical, self-deprecating Norwegian fashion I said, hey, that wasn't too bad. I think I will jot that down in the morning. And I thought oh no no no no, you might not remember this in the morning.

JW: You'll forget it.

AL: Yeah, so I got up at two o'clock in the morning, went to my desk and I sketched it out. Now the amazing thing about that dream is it put it all together for me a year of studying in the library, a year listening to all the lectures from all the stars, and in a little, short dream segment it seemed to all come together and that short dream was the basis for—I think edited 12 strategy books on

readings—was the basis for those and of the hundreds of lectures I gave again and again. It was all based on the little three-legged stool.

MD: One of the things about genius or inspiration is that once someone comes up with it, it strikes everyone else as so patently obvious that they could not have lived without it. As a conception the ends, ways and means, however one construes them after you came up with your stool model, appears in the case of the Army and others to have taken hold. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how you spread that idea amongst the Army and the Force.

AL: Okay. There were some problems there. First, I'm going to say that I classify that dream as a beautiful, wonderful gift that came to me. I don't feel that I can take credit for it. Maybe some people say I had studied a lot and so forth and so on, and I don't know how the brain operates, but I think it was a wonderful, useful, tremendous gift that I got and I'm very very thankful for it. My biggest help was... well first, I'll say my trouble at the War College was caused by difficulties with people not wanting to buy the little three-legged stool. For instance, there was a challenge from historians.

JW: Historians are really annoying sometimes. I am one so I can say that.

AL: The leader of the Military History Institute went to our commandant, Major General Jack Merritt, and said to General Merritt, we're teaching strategy the wrong way, and I would like to point that out to you. And General Merritt said, you certainly can, we'll have a meeting and we will have a discussion, he said. And he set up a meeting with the Military History Institute and me and my department chairman who was the DNSS man which is Mark's job now, and so we went to the meeting and the commandant already knew about the three-legged stool and so forth and the way we were teaching strategy, so he didn't have us speak at all. He just turned it all over to the MHI director and he talked and talked about the wonders of history and so forth and so on, and then at the end, he said military strategy must be taught in a historical sequence. The commandant didn't say anything but all he did was turn in his chair and look over at me. I did not say anything, but I calmly and slowly shook my head back and forth saying no, no, no, and the commandant closed the meeting by saying I want you all to know that we will teach strategy Art's way. So, that was nice, but it didn't make the historians very happy.

JW: The critique from the historians was that the stool wasn't historically situated or historically grounded, that it didn't give students a sense of how strategic thought evolved over time?

AL: I love history and I love the old battles and the Trojan Horse and the Athenians versus the Spartans, wonderful, wonderful things to read and study about, but I think you have to know what the hell you're talking about first and what is strategy, what are the component parts.

JW: And as you said, you had read a lot of history while you were reading and studying as well. So, in this historian's mind, they're not in competition.

AL: Well that sounds wonderful because I don't think you and I would have had any problem at all.

JW: No, I don't think so [laughter]. So, after the meeting, you continued to teach strategy Art's way, using the stool model. Do you recall how it was received by students at the time?

AL: No problem at all. Now I should have mentioned, when I learned at the Pentagon as an action officer that if you have a paper and you want it to be the best possible paper you could make it, you don't stop by doing it yourself. You make many copies of it and you send it on out and beg for comments from others to help improve your paper. And I had done that and got a lot of wonderful support from the students. From the students? Yes, I asked the students to help me. The faculty of course and other people, and so that was a big help. Now I think maybe this is the time to talk about a strange thing that happened one day at the War College just before 1987, so it would be about November of 1986. I had worked in the morning and I'd gone into Carlisle at home for lunch and I got a telephone call from the War College Dean. And he said, Art, we've got a problem here. Senator Nunn the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee has sent his chief-of-staff up here. He's a Mr. Arnold Punaro who was also a reserve marine general, real sharp guy. And he said we've given him all the briefings that I thought he wanted like the curriculum briefings, the history of the War College and so forth and so on. But Art, all he wants to talk about is strategy, so could you please come in this afternoon and give them your pitch about strategy. I said of course I will, so about an hour or two later, I went into the War College and into one of the seminar rooms, and we brought up Arnold Punaro, by himself, nobody with him. He sat down and I was going to give him this... I didn't take me long, 15 minutes, something like that to go over the three-legged stool, what it was and so forth and so on. And he started grilling me, asking question after question after question. It must have been one hour, but it showed that he was really interested. We did not know then that Senator Nunn had decided to hold lengthy hearings on the subject of military strategy, the first part of the 100th Congress. So, that would have made it January of 1987. After a few weeks of mulling what had happened and so forth, I got asked if I could, if I would be able to get down to Washington and brief the Senate Armed Services Committee on the three-legged stool. And I said of course I would, I would love to do that. But there were problems there too because many people in the Army, even on the Army staff, wondered is this a good idea to get involved into this with the Senate? Even the Vice Chairman of the Army Staff, I think it was then Max Thurman, a three-star general came to the War College to give a speech, and he wanted to see me before his speech. So, with some hesitation and concern, I went down to Bliss Hall, the auditorium there, and met with the General, and the first thing he said to me was something like, Art, why the hell does Senator

Nunn want to talk to you about strategy and so forth. Well, it just kind of put me back a little bit but I came right on back to him and said, Sir, all they want from me is a definition of what strategy is. I said, Sir, I'm not going to get into anything at all about current military strategy or policy. And General Thurman threw up his hands and says, sounds great Art, go ahead, good luck. No problem then. So, I did go down there and gave my little 15-minute little briefing. It was a little difficult because those Senate rooms are not set up for slides and projectors and things like that, but I had good support from the Army Staff. They sent the colonel on over with a tripod and everything else. So, that went very, very well. Now, I had also worried about this, about questions that might come to me after the briefing, and I had war-gamed a lot of them in my mind. What might Senator Nunn ask me? And guess what, Senator Nunn asked me one of the questions at the end of that day. He said, Colonel Lykke, I want to know your opinion about what is the biggest problem facing our structuring a national military strategy today. And I was able to say, Sir, I have watched senior people from the services come to the War College and talk about a maritime strategy, an amphibious strategy and so forth and so on. I'm concerned that the services have got to get together and have one agreed upon joint or national military strategy. And Senator Nunn said to me do you think that's starting to happen right now? And I said, yes Sir, I do because I'd seen it at the War College. So, that was a wonderful experience. I was very impressed with Senator Nunn and his staff and so forth. They had let me speak and give my little pitch on the little old three-legged stool which even survives then, and it survives today.

JW: Absolutely. I think there's lots of good advice for our War College students who are listening, about practicing, getting your pitch down, war-gaming, thinking about questions. Those are all, I think, things that we would like for our students to be able to do if they're called to testify before Congress or prep senior leaders to do the same.

With a firm understanding of Art's inspiration for and creation of the three-legged stool, we will end part I of this interview. Join us again in part II to hear Art's rebuttal to critics and his thoughts on the benefits of the War College experience.