

JEREMY BLACK

Military History

Some Introductions Designed to Begin a Debate



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Images on the cover and in the book are particulars from the seven tapestries of the Battle of Pavia, manufactured in Bruxelles in 1528-42 by Bernard van Orley (1491-1541), now in Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte (Photos 2015 by Alonso de Mendoza, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported, in wikipedia commons)

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Military History and the Whig Interpretation

In Memoriam Dennis Showalter
(December 31th, 2019)

The death on the night of 30-31 December of Dennis Showalter marks the passing of a great scholar and good friend. The much-published Dennis, a great expert in German military history, and a past President of the Society for Military History, as well as a winner of the Paul Birdsall Prize and the Pritzker Literature Award, was an inspiration to all who knew him. Rough and ready in his demeanour and language (he frequently sent me ‘what the fuck’ emails about the idiocies of historians), he was a remarkable in his range and his ability to offer original insights. Paradox was one of tools and irony a means. Loathing the caste nature of the academic profession, he was proud of his position at Colorado College and, decrying political correctness, of his many links with the U.S. Military. A witty speaker, he was an expert at what makes a good lecturer – an ability to engage simultaneously at different levels in order to match the varied intelligence, knowledge and commitment of his audience. He also was a determined exponent of writing for the public. Bestriding the chasm between the introverted pointillism of so many academics, and the conceptual, methodological and contextual limitations of most of the trade writers, Dennis, who was always working, delivered book after book of insight.

For me he was a good friend. I first met many years ago on a trip to Colorado, when invited by the late Bob McJimsey, one of his friends and colleagues, and we got on well from the outset. We both enjoyed our meetings and particularly when we were able to do double-acts, most memorably for me thanks to invites to speak at Rick Schneid’s Rothenberg Seminar. Dennis was one of my referees, and frequently reported on drafts of my books. His help was always sympathetic and invaluable. As two driven individuals, we

understood each other and with much affection. I paid a tribute in an essay ‘Military Cultures, Military Histories and the Current Emergency’ in *Arms and the Man. Military History Essays in Honor of Dennis Showalter* (2011) edited by Michael Neiberg, a sparkling volume that included William Astore’s perceptive ‘Loving the German War Machine: America’s Infatuation with *Blitzkrieg*, Warfighters and Militarism’ and Ginny Kiesling’s brilliant demolition of a lot of conceptive nonsense, not least that of David Bell, in her “‘Total War, Total Nonsense” or “The Military Historian’s Fetish.”” [*The First Total War: Napoleon, Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007]. I add now the following as a small testimony of affection and respect for the greatest of military historians of my lifetime.

MILITARY HISTORY AND THE WHIG INTERPRETATION

‘Military history is arguably the last stronghold of what historiographers call the “Whig interpretation”.’¹ Dennis’s characteristically bracing start in 2002 to one of his many sparkling essays has long excited my interest, and that I referred to in my *Rethinking Military History* (2004). Dennis indeed indicated by his remark a situation that remains the case, namely the poorly and under-theorised nature of the subject, notably the generally unproblematic account of change and subject. As a consequence, there is a need to address critically the ideas that currently prevail.

These aspects are linked in this under-theorised subject, one in which most of the engagement, by researchers, writers and readers, is with more detailed topics, indeed much more detailed ones. Such a situation is one that unsurprisingly will see the reiteration of theoretical conceptions and methods, however tired or problematic. I would argue that these include such staples as War and Society, Face of Battle, and Military Revolutions; each of which, of course, is very different in genesis, scope, and content.

¹ D. SHOWALTER, ‘Europe’s Way of War, 1815-64,’ in J. BLACK (ed.), *European Warfare 1815-2000* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 27.

Others, understandably, will spring to the defence of these concepts, or at least of their application in part, and may offer, instead, different ones for criticism such as the cultural interpretation of military history. Yet, whatever the particular instances in discussion, and we shall consider several of them, it seems apparent that in the field of military history, it is possible to use a theory that is definitely tired, if not worse, and to do so for many decades. The subject, moreover, is indeed Whiggish, because there is a Whiggish bent in some of the established accounts, and notably in terms of what Showalter in 2002 correctly saw as a bias toward progressivism.²

The Whiggish interpretation and/or mindset face significant conceptual and methodological problems. There is, most notably, the problem that the model imposes a template on events that leaves out what does not fit in. Instead, insisting on a granular approach means viewing them under the immediate circumstances of a particular time. In practice, the degree to which development, however conceptualised, is not linear, nor indeed uniform, subverts the standard usage of the Whiggish interpretation.

And yet, ironically, the very continuity of established accounts in theoretical discussion, or at least mention, suggest that, in this respect, there is an opposite to progressivism in terms of a somewhat stale repetition of long-established views. That point may be difficult to credit, but there is, indeed, a contrast between a sense of progressive adaptability in interpretation provided by these staples and their apparent prospectus, and what, in practice, is the repetition of such views.

Turning to the ‘why?’ question is always instructive, as the Whiggishness and the conceptual conservatism each arise for particular reasons. It is important to consider both the reasons for the Whiggish approach to military history, and its functions. As with the very military systems themselves, there is in their discussion a fitness-for-purpose dimension. In particular, a simple account, whether progressive or not, serves the purposes of two important constituencies. First, it enables military historians to move rapidly to the operational and tactical levels that tend most to interest them and their audiences. In particular, a relatively simplistic theoretical structure deproblematizes, if

2 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

not simplifies, what might otherwise be difficult conceptual, methodological and historiographical issues, or even pretends or implies that they do not really exist. As such, the sub-discipline can proceed without any need to consider the constant procedural relationship between theory and practice. Moreover, this approach enables those working on a part of the subject to feel that they understand the rest of it and thereby can readily contextualise their own contribution.

Secondly, both the nature of the subject, and the manner in which it is approached, including the conceptual conservatism involved, is partly due to the origins of military history as vocational training for young (and older) officers. This is not merely vestigial, as much of military history is still written by current or former officers, while many of the ‘consumers’ of military history are students in military academies and other officer-training programmes. These military men are oriented, due to their rank, needs and, often, interests, toward the operational and tactical levels; and not to theoretical reflection and, whether or not related to that, nor to conceptual or methodological discussion.

Thirdly, such an account of warfare offers much to non-military historians. These are the bulk of the profession. Although many academic historians (and others) almost seem to wish that war did not exist, or that it could be subsumed within the category of violence, and treated thereby as a type of pathology, they tend to be aware that war has important contextual and causative results. As such, it is difficult to ignore. Yet, that point then poses the issue of how best to respond to the need to discuss war. This is usually done by providing a relatively simple approach. Moreover, such an approach is apparently best if it shares a non-military history in content and/or theory, as in the case of the thesis of *Military Revolutions*; or if the treatment of war essentially presents it, or aspects of it, as epiphenomena of supposedly deeper structural factors, thus pushing conceptualisation into the latter.

Fourthly, the nature of non-military readers should be considered. The overwhelming majority of the audience for military history are non-academics. Indeed, while military history has declined and shrivelled in academic departments, it is flourishing in bookstores, on airport book stacks, on Amazon, and on websites. The general public’s interest in history, however, has always been highly presentist. This apparently is a method for the reader to understand our present situation and for the writer to inform us about the correct

/ wise / desirable path into the future. Great public interest, indeed, is something that is saving military history, in the face of academic disdain, and has many positives, but they come with some negatives as well, as part, as it were, of the package deal.

In practice, there are serious flaws; with the various approaches or theories on offer being subject to conceptual, methodological, and empirical qualifications, both in their own right, and with regard to them being able to act as more general accounts and/or explanations of military history. Indeed, some of the scholarship of recent years has challenged such powerful building blocks as technological determinism, the early-modern Military Revolution, and Face of Battle work.

Whatever the approach, the issue is how far to assume a focus on development and how far, instead, to offer an account that does not rest on such a thesis, not least with its questionable linked ideas of modernisation and modernity. In particular, modernisation and modernity were, and are still, presented whether, explicitly or subliminally, in terms of improvement. However, that approach was to be proved deeply problematic in terms of the successful resistance of opponents to what were held to be cutting-edge military powers. In short, how are North Vietnam in the 1970s or the Taliban in the 1990s-2010s to be built into the model, and its equations. Moreover, the changing character of the apparent nature of modernity - for example, in the 1990s-2000s, from the Revolution in Military Affairs to Wars Among the People, make this even more difficult, as modernisation is therefore unclear. So also on other scales and in different contexts. Thus, the total war capability of the mid-twentieth century was not that sought in the 2010s.

A related, but all-too-common, conceptual flaw, as in Rupert Smith's impressive *The Utility of Force. The Art of War in the Modern World*,³ is to assume a central narrative. At times, this can lead to the assumption of clear paradigms of capability and strength, and the world operating as if it was an isotropic service, one that is equal in all parts. This approach was and is opposite to that of a fitness for purpose, with capability and effectiveness considered accordingly. The latter, however, was/is an appropriate response to

3 First edition, London, 2005; second London, 2019.

a task-based and contextual account of military activity, one that took full account of the range of circumstances arising from culturally-specific environments, and the consequent variations in understandings and presentations of victory and defeat, success and failure, suffering and loss. Such an approach is inherently granulated or gritty, rather than smooth; and it undermines notions of clear progression,⁴ or, rather, makes them redundant. So also to a degree with the scholarship involved.⁵

A granulated approach, moreover, complicates attempts to segregate particular categories or classes of military activity, as well as to have an hierarchy accordingly. Military history has to be contextual in examining episodes, and not just battles, with an emphasis on immediate circumstances. ‘Fit for purpose’ and ‘best practice’ have to be read in terms of the specific context, notably the challenge at hand, and not in the light of the wider arc of technological development. They are also rhetorical devices in the continued debate over military practice, and, with it, history.

So also with the organisation of forces. Issues of recruitment, of command, of victory, and of loss, affect the organisation of forces. Their recompense, loyalty, reliability, command and control systems, and ties to society, all vary, as do issues of motivation. It is possible to portray a developmental progression, not least from *ancien régime* (1648-1789), via revolutionary / national / conscript (1792-1866) and mass-reserve (1866-1970), to volunteer-technical (1970-). However, such a model suffers, first, from its concentration on land rather than naval forces, and, secondly from a Westerncentricism that treats Western powers as crucial and argues that other powers feature only if they replicate Western developments. This is certainly an unhelpful way to cover the period up to 1750 and even 1800, by which time European dominance was still limited in Africa and in East and South Asia, as well as not even being the case in the Balkans.

This approach also omits the extent to which non-European societies have followed different military trajectories in the nineteenth and twentieth centu-

4 As in D. A. BELL, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston, Mass., 2007).

5 E. C. KIESLING, “‘Total War, Total Nonsense’ or ‘The Military Historian’s Fetish,’” in M. S. NEIBERG (ed.), *Arms and the Man* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 223-27.

ries, especially if due heed is paid to social and political contexts. Thus, models devised to explain the role of the military in modern Europe are unhelpful when it comes to considering China or Iraq, Indonesia or Pakistan. And yet the military in the latter frequently played a far greater role in projects of modernity and modernisation than their counterparts in Europe or the United States.

There are obvious modern indicators supporting such a granulated approach, notably in terms of the deficiencies of great-power expeditionary warfare after World War Two. In one approach, this trajectory represents the failure of one form of ‘progressivism,’ in the face of another form, in the shape of the doctrine and techniques of insurgency warfare. However, it is more pertinent simply to draw attention to the deficiencies of these very developmental ideas and to return, instead, to a consideration in terms of specifics.

Fitness for purpose also helps address a key aspect of present-day military history, that of its global coverage and, in particular, a global coverage that is not simplified in terms of a thesis such as the diffusion of a Western practice that is apparently or allegedly inherently best practice. Instead, there is a need to approach a global coverage by noting the autonomous variety of developments and initiatives and, in particular, the extent to which, as a consequence, Western-derived theories run adrift. This has been demonstrated as specialists in non-Western military history, such as Peter Lorge for China,⁶ employ the concept and vocabulary of military revolution in order to undermine the idea that it describes a Western paradigm and process. Indeed, by stating or implying the possibility of an Eastern paradigm and process, the simple correlation made with reference to the original idea of a Military Revolution is rendered highly problematic. Separately, Westerncentricism in military history encourages the misleading presentation of imperialism, and indeed waging modern war, as essentially Western, and as imposed on other continents that were inherently peaceful. This is totally mistaken.

A critique from a different direction comes from another instance of the use of evidence. There was in early-modern Christian Europe a large number of publications relating to war. These can be viewed as a key aspect of mo-

6 P. LORGE, *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb* (Cambridge, 2008).

ernity, and one that indeed differentiated the West; although there were such publications in China and Japan. Other approaches, however, can be offered. As an aspect of the role of non-weapons technology, printing certainly transformed the writing about war in Christian Europe from the fifteenth century and, even more, the sixteenth. Books strengthened the consciousness of a specific military tradition, not least as printed manuals, whether on gunnery, tactics, drill, siegecraft or fortification, spread techniques far more rapidly than word of mouth or manuscript. Manuals permitted a degree of standardisation that, arguably over the long term, helped, at least for some powers, to increase military effectiveness and that was important for cohesion and the utilisation of military resources.

More generally, printing and literacy fostered discussion of military organisation and methods, and encouraged a sense of system, affecting and reflecting cultural assumptions. Information can therefore be seen as a key aspect of the shift towards consistency, regularity and uniformity in Western forces, as it encoded these characteristics and replicated them, which was a particular feature of the culture of print. Printing made it possible to disseminate reports, knowledge and opinion, rapidly and at great distance. Contemporary writings on war reflected the sense that not only were there lessons to be learned, but that they needed learning, a situation, inherent anyway to war, that has remained the case since.

Yet, there could be a backward-looking dimension, one that reflects the nature of knowledge and verification in the period and also, ironically, the extent to which, drawing on the revolution of the heavenly spheres, *ie* their orbit, the idea of a revolution in this period was that of a return to the starting place, a theme seen in Britain with the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9. Philological work and the Printing Revolution were linked to the widespread 'rediscovery,' and availability, in Christian Europe of Classical texts, and this return to the past served to validate new emphases. Rather than seeing this process as past, it is instructive to note the frequency in recent and current discussion of earlier writers, notably Clausewitz, Mahan and Corbett.

In the early-modern West, Classical texts were reprinted, both in the original and in translation, as with Aegidius, Caesar and Vergilius among the re-printing of Classical texts. There was also current work on the Classical peri-

od, as with Jacob von Wallhausen's *La Milice Romane* (1616). Contemporary Western warfare could be understood in part in Classical terms: the Greeks, Macedonians and Romans did not have gunpowder weapons, but their forces did have a mixture of infantry and cavalry, and of cold steel and projectiles. The large-scale use of the pike in many respects represented a revival of the Macedonian phalanx, and could be presented thus. In his *Libro dell' Arte della Guerra* (*Art of War*, 1521), Niccolo Machiavelli tried, with some success, to update Flavius Vegetius' fourth- or fifth-century *Epitoma Rei Militaris* [*On Military Matters*] by focusing on the pike and treating the handgun as similar to missile weaponry. Both pressure for continuity and calls for change were framed in terms of revival and, linked to this, defended by frequent backward-looking reference to the Classics. This practice continued to be the case, as with the writings of Marshal Saxe in the eighteenth century. The German General Staff preference for a Cannae-type encirclement, one that affected operational planning in both world wars, can be regarded as another, but different, manifestation of this tendency.

An alternative method toward modernity relied on a new form of 'best practice', in the shape of the experimentation of the Scientific Revolution, notably with ballistics. For artillery, there was a process of mathematisation through an engagement with ballistics. Theoretical and empirical advances greatly increased the predictive power of ballistics, and helped turn gunnery from a craft into a science that could, and should, be taught. The extent of change in scientific thought in a relatively brief period, notably physics and mathematics, helps explain the value of the term 'the Scientific Revolution' and, by extension, underlines the limitations of the concept of the 'Military Revolution', which is employed to describe a far longer period.

The very presentation of so much material in print was an aspect of change, with entrepreneurial opportunities a particular aspect in (Christian) Europe, and less so in the Orient. The response to the potential of gunpowder was a major aspect of this development in (Christian) Europe. This response included speculation over likely consequences and most appropriate reactions. Yet, again indicating the need for care in the consideration of evidence, the repeated character of much of the discussion poses a question mark against simplistic attempts to discern a 'Military Revolution.' Instead, publications testify to continuities as much as changes, and also to a sense of other prac-

tices that should be superseded, notably non-bureaucratic heroic command styles. The literature on weaponry and tactics also offered a range of suggestions, and some scarcely matched the revolutionary prospectus outlined by Michael Roberts and Geoffrey Parker, the protagonists of the thesis of a Western military revolution.

An emphasis on specificities, and on the deconstruction of established theories, raises the ‘whither theory?’ question, in the shape of, is there more to tell other than ‘one war after another’? That is an appropriate point, and deserves consideration; but the understandable desire to shape the past and the need to be selective in what is covered, should not be a cover for poor theory.

Instead, types of military history other than that of battle, where, indeed, frequently success was a matter not of weapon usage but of experience, unit cohesion and leadership, can be considered in order to underline the need to engage with very different taskings. Fortifications provides a key instance, and it serves to offer a valuable contextualisation to the standard focus on battles, or rather on an atypical selection of battles, such as Breitenfeld (1631) and Plassey (1757), rather than the more complex range of battles in the Thirty Years’ War (1618-48); or in eighteenth-century India, notably the invasions of northern India first by Nadir Shah of Persia and then by Afghan forces. The latter demonstrate the problem with the argument that Plassey, and indeed other British victories, necessarily define capability, effectiveness and success. With fortification, as with other aspects of military strength, there is the need to consider the multiple impact, including in terms of deterrence.

There is also the obligation to unpick clear ideas of proficiency. Thus, strength is in part a matter of opportunity costs, not least, in some cases, in terms of the very issues of expenditure of manpower, material, and money. The standard history of fortification is similar to that of much military activity, in that there is a focus on the state and the formal fortification carried out accordingly for the use of regular forces. This leaves to one side the more complex role of fortification, and, in particular, its significance for private or semi-private purposes.⁷

There is a widespread tendency to treat private warfare as anachronistic

⁷ J. BLACK, *Fortifications and Siegecraft: Defense and Attack Through the Ages* (Lanham, MA, 2018)

and redundant, and thus a pathology of the system that should have been brought under control and that scarcely established standards for capability. That might be the case if the perspective adopted is that of significance and progress in terms of the development of regular forces. That, however, is less the case if the frame of reference is one of power around the world, with the centralised state and its regular forces frequently only one, albeit generally the most important player.⁸

If that is the case today, it was even more so in the past. That, however, is an aspect of military history that tends to be underplayed due to a focus not only on definitions from the present (and theories accordingly), but also, more misleadingly, as already indicated, a sense that the situation was moving toward the present. This has led to a variety of assumptions. It has for example led to an emphasis on recruitment and supply systems that rely on state provision, rather than assuming that private provision could have an appropriately important role. Indeed, this emphasis is an aspect of the assumption that the state should come first in the discussion of the military.⁹

Thus, returning to fortifications, the developmental model has to be used with caution. In particular, ‘cutting edge’ fortifications are not always those that were pursued. They were generally the most costly, not least as entailing the redundancy of existing systems, and, for that and other reasons, not necessarily the most appropriate. Indeed, lower-specification fortifications proved particularly cost-effective, not only for many states, but also for ‘non-state actors.’ Cost could be a matter of money, but also of garrison size and strength. Each represented opportunity costs, a point more generally the case with military procurement, doctrine, and strategy.

The value of lower-specification fortifications has remained the case to the present, not least in the protection of public buildings, whether, for example, with strengthened glass, or with guard-posts of some type at the entrance. In areas with a high rate of instability and lawlessness, many households

8 A recent, conceptually-sophisticated, approach is offered in G. CHET, *The Ocean is a Wilderness: Atlantic Piracy and the Limits of Governmental Legitimacy in the Modern State, 1688-1856* (New York, 2012).

9 For a valuable corrective, D. PARROTT, *The Business of War: Military enterprise and military revolution in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2012).

have some form of protection. This characteristic can be seen with internal protective rooms, or 'cages', in the event of housebreakers coming in, as in Johannesburg, Lagos and Nairobi. Outer defences are seen with many households in the case of iron gates and fences to protect access via the front garden. Some companies have established compounds where their workers live. This is also the model used by states that maintain embassies in violence-prone areas.

This situation clearly parallels that in the medieval period, with the need, then and now, to fortify both public and private buildings. In one light, fortification was, and remains, a key aspect of what can be seen as insurance, with the latter both public and private, and offered by public and private bodies, although in a relationship that differs both geographically and across time. By the mid-1990s, about 2.5 million American families lived in gated communities and the number has risen since. Thus, tasks and physical manifestations change, but without any clear sense of there being a paradigm in fortification, and therefore without there being a clear best practice, or development.

So also with other aspects of capability, for example warships or aircraft. What might appear the best specifications for weaponry are often not only the most costly but also, in part due to the resulting risks incurred through such losses, the most inflexible. The consequences can be to favour less costly aircraft and warships, such as the new frigates proposed by Britain in 2019, or aircraft developed by non-traditional arms manufacturers, for example Brazil.

There is also, as already indicated, the question of varying tasks. In these cases, and to focus solely on state provision and not, for example, that by drug networks, there are clear differences between what is required for state-to-state provision and what is needed for security against other challenges. The latter include lawlessness, such as piracy, for example from Somalia, and in the Malacca Straits, smuggling, and other forms of illegal activity. Uncontrollable drug operations in Mexico and Honduras are responsible for turf wars, rampant violence, hostage-taking, and the elimination of witnesses. This was particularly apparent in Mexico in late 2019, with the annual death rate by then about 35,000. However, the inherent inability of the drug cartels to co-operate lessened their threat to the state, as opposed to its operations. As a related point, the frontier wall President Donald Trump proposes is intended

for confronting illegal immigration and crime, and for domestic political purposes, rather than serving as a military tool against other states. As such, it is difficult to assess how it fits into a Whiggish model.

Yet, there can be an overlap in the case of the funding by lawless behaviour of separatist forces as in parts of Myanmar (Burma). Thus, the Kachin Independence Army and the Arakan Army were allegedly funded by protection money, drug production and dealing, and using control over minerals and over goods such as jade.

More generally, determining what is progressive, if such a concept is to be adopted, requires a sense of the challenges of the present, and also of past and future, and of how these can be related. This sense can be seen in terms of debate over procurement; although procurement means different things to particular groups, and also during specific times. Scarcely a new issue, such debates adopt the language of improvement and improvability; but that is at once both analysis and rhetoric, a situation more generally true with military history. Thus, hypersonic missiles, of the type now under development by China, Russia and the United States, may prove 'magic bullet' improvements able soon to transform the parameters of force to an hitherto quasi-fictional extent; but they may also prove weapons that are of limited flexibility in terms of options for their use, as well as being expensive to produce, deploy, supply, and replace. So also with the continuing instance of atomic weaponry. Moreover, all weapons are greatly affected by the development of anti-weapons and anti-tactics, and that again counters ready notions of improvement. This process has continued into recent years, as with roadside explosives and drones.

Time, therefore, is a variable that has to be employed with care, and notably so if granulated analysis is to be preferred to the rhetoric of improvement, whether or not supposedly revolutionary. This situation is likely to continue into the future, and not least because it is far from clear what context the major challenges will emerge from, and, more especially, whether they will be internal or external. If the basic driver in the world is that of population growth, and the resulting pressure for resources, then both are in play, but the most likely one is internal, as with both the Arab Spring and Indonesia in the 2010s, and, maybe, India in the 2020s. This point, moreover, seems plausible in light

of the difficulties of matching economic growth and domestic assumptions. There will also be resource struggles between states, for example over water in North-East Africa and South-West Asia.

Given this case, it is unclear how a Whiggish account of warfare can be regarded as appropriate. Instead, if 'Whiggishness' is at play, it will be, as with Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), in terms of the supposed model of the nature of society, and thus possibly be a variant on 'War and Society' approaches; although very differently to how they are conventionally approached. Conversely, if the weakness of multilateralism in the late 2010s is seen as prefiguring a rise in international tension, then it is possible that the emphasis instead should be on what enhances or lessens capability gaps in state-to-state conflict.

This tension within the range of military environments and tasks is not simply co-terminous with that of external and internal factors, but that is certainly a helpful approach to the issue. The problem with the theorisation of military history is that it generally relates to the external context of state-to-state conflict, and not to the internal of civil conflict; and this tendency makes scant sense for the many states and societies for which the latter is more significant. This observation includes much, although far from all, of the military history of Latin America, Africa and Oceania over the last half-century. Thus, since 1936, South American militaries have rarely engaged in state-to-state conflict. Moreover, even with major states, there can be a greater emphasis on the internal dimension, as with India and China in the same period. Integrating the internal with the external poses issues for historians. In particular, it does so for those attempting to offer a developmental account and/or a theoretical approach; the account and the approach being linked, but not co-terminous.

In addition, this point about the need to integrate civil conflict is enhanced if the notion of military extends to the armed paramilitaries that play a major role in the internal dimension of military activity. That point may appear to be addressed by them not being regular forces. However, in many states, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States and India, bodies with names such as the National Guard, the Republican Guard, and the Frontier Force, can also play a role, indeed a major role, in conflict with foreign forces. These are in effect alternative regular forces and, more particularly, regular forces

controlled by central government that counteract the regular army and that, as especially loyal, can be used for domestic control and have often been developed for that purpose.

There are also irregular forces, both state and non-state sanctioned, as was readily apparent in the conflicts in Syria in the 2010s, including with Turkish intervention in 2019. Hybrid warfare, in practice a long-established practice that attracted a particular term in the mid-2010s, notably after the Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014, has led to a greater interest of late in the use of irregular forces.

Thus, the would-be precision that underlies much of the theoretical approach faces problems. So also with the attempt to distinguish between strategy and policy. Here, again, there is a degree of Whiggish positivism that is linked to the idea that the development in the late nineteenth century of a specialist body for the formulation and execution of strategy, in the shape of a general staff, represented progress. In particular this progress was seen as coming from distinguishing strategy from policy. The latter was held, and notably so by commentators close to the military, a group that includes most of those writing on military affairs, to sit in a political context that, allegedly, because of its very political character, was flawed or, at the least, unable to cope with the exigencies of military matters.¹⁰ Strategy, in contrast, was defined as a proper sphere for the military.

In practice, this approach to strategy is problematic in conceptual terms, because the distinction between policy and strategy is not clear-cut; and that is the case in terms of both formulation and execution. The same individuals frequently do both, in so far as they can be differentiated. Any paradigm of best practice, furthermore, was complicated by the extent to which former military officers turned politicians. Moreover, and here the issues of Whiggishness and its use take on an additional perspective, there is (as with weaponry and procurement) the question of particular interests at stake and of their ability to employ arguments to serve their views. In this case, the strategy/policy distinction is in practice very much employed by the military, and notably so in Britain and the United States, in order to provide space for a degree of au-

¹⁰ L. SONDHHAUS, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War* (London, 2006).

tonomy from governmental direction that is lacking in reality in many states, notably China. Circumstances, moreover, vary at every size of state.

There is an additional dimension, in the shape of the argument now that strategy is in some way a lost art, an argument applied to Western interventionism in the 2000s.¹¹ This failure has been blamed on the collapse of the strategy/policy distinction, and thus on the politicians, but the wisdom of this explanation is problematic as it downplays the inherent difficulties of both Western policy and strategy, however defined, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both goals and implementation were seriously flawed from the outset, and, moreover, were so as aspects of a confused and largely unsuccessful response to a range of issues, from Chinese and Russian assertion and expansionism, to the successful, or at least difficult, ‘anti-strategies’ of Afghan and Iraqi opponents. The difficulties of comprehending non-state actors complicated the situation and led to pressure for a new theoretical structure, one in which the concept of hybrid warfare played a major role.

The confusion over the term strategy is more generally instructive for the difficulties facing Whiggish accounts. In large part, the evaluation of military history, and notably so for modern military history, is political, not least due to the quest to proclaim messages or lessons. That indeed is more important than the effort to learn them, whatever learn means in this context. ‘Messages’ and ‘lessons’ are linked to politics, both outside the military and within it, for the military is an intensely political environment, and with this politicisation generally highly competitive, and so both within and between particular services and specialisations. It would be foolish to neglect the extent to which this situation affects, usually greatly so, most writings about military activity, and notably concerning developments in a long-term context.

Not surprisingly, this point can better be appreciated if the national context of military publication is assessed; a context that is encouraged by linguistic factors as well as the nature of publishing. There might, instead, appear to be a universal language of analysis, if the frequency of references to Clausewitz *et al* is considered; or the spread of the vocabulary of strategy; or the publication in foreign editions of works such as Geoffrey Parker’s influential *Military*

11 H. STRACHAN, ‘The Lost Meaning of Strategy,’ *Survival*, 47 (2005), pp. 33-54.

Revolution (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1996).¹²

However, this approach, a classic diffusionist one, and one that is greatly encouraged by military groups that benefit accordingly, underplays, or generally ignores completely, the extent to which perception is important to the reception of these initiatives. In addition, past and present, there are different national traditions, embedded in specific strategic cultures, that are greatly of consequence in framing particular understandings of tasks and concepts, and thereby strategies. Military institution publications, which are inherently national, seek to address the situation.

In all cases, strategy, and thus its historical grounding, overlaps with the politics of policy-making and with the related public politics of contestation. In both, the use of strategy served (and continues to serve) rhetorical and political purposes.¹³ Moreover, although generally in different ways, these purposes also affected the use of the term both within the military and among academic commentators.

The wider overlap with politics includes the crucial role of international relations. Alliances, would-be alliances, and opposing alliances, entailed and entail commitments and possibilities in terms of goals and means that involved the pressures and problems of co-operation. As a result, to offer any account of goals, and means, indeed, of strategy, that does not take adequate note of the international context, its role as an independent variable, and its multiple consequences, is seriously flawed. This is taken further because much current writing, both historical and addressing the present, focuses on the West, and frequently to the detriment of other regions and assumptions. The extent to which the independent and different assumptions and role of others is underplayed is a serious flaw in much of the literature. Moreover, within individual states, military history cannot really be discussed without engaging with foreign affairs and the domestic counterpart.

Strategy thus emerges not as a set of documents, but as a practice in an open-ended field of analysis. It can be approached in terms of what needs to be achieved (the tasks), how this will be done (the ways), and the resources

¹² For a critique, J. BLACK, *Beyond the Military Revolution* (Basingstoke, 2011).

¹³ J. BLACK, *Military Strategy: A Global History* (New Haven, Conn., 2020).

employed (the means). Each affects the others, not only in terms of content, but also of how it is understood, and at every level; and both then and subsequently; a situation that undercuts the Whiggish interpretation. The use of individual conflicts as rhetorical and polemical tools, for example ‘World War One,’ or ‘Vietnam,’ or ‘Suez,’ and of particular battles, accordingly, for example ‘the Somme’ or ‘Dresden,’ similarly exemplifies this point. Linked to this, comes the role of domestic politics in war, notably, in sustaining support.

Indeed, in both international and domestic terms, strategies emerge in response to, and in order to forward, coalitions of interest; although the domestic dimension of these coalitions tends to be overlooked or, rather, underrated in much writing on military strategy. The means by which these coalitions are formed and re-formed become relevant to the process by which strategies are advanced, debated, and reformulated. Indeed, the ability to maintain such coalitions is a key element of strategic activity, and a central link between domestic and international politics, and war-making. At the same time, the coalitions of World War Two are very different to those of the twenty-first century. It is not clear that Whiggish perspectives, including those of ‘military revolutions,’ are helpful here. Nor do they really help with the analysis of terrorism or, more specifically, of the ‘War on Terror.’

The context and process of coalition formation, both domestic and international, and the related goal-setting, are not static, but, again, it is not clear that any progressivism, Whiggish or otherwise, is appropriate here. That is particularly the case now, as progressivist narratives in international relations all appear exploded, whether they are of international Marxism, or liberal internationalism, or of civilizational conflict, or, as was argued in the 1990s, of America as a unipower at some supposed end of history. So also for earlier overarching explanations, such as religious contest, Western imperialism, or imperial China as the world-state. A new set of analytical suppositions is required.

In terms of conceptualisation, the most helpful is that of fitness for purpose within a context of strategic cultures; provided neither is understood in overly proscriptive terms, let alone deterministic ones. The concept of strategic culture, a term employed to discuss the context within which military tasks are ‘shaped,’ is based on the notion that general beliefs, attitudes, and patterns

of behaviour, were, and remain, integral to the politics of power, rather than being dependent on the policy circumstances of a particular conjuncture. At the same time, the use of this, as of other concepts, has to address specific historical contexts; and doing so underlines the important roles of politics and contingency, again undermining Whiggish approaches.

In practice, there are frequently competing strategic visions based on contested notions of the strategic culture, and this is linked to debates about taskings, and related issues of doctrine and procurement. The dynamic and contested character of strategic evolution nevertheless includes fundamental changes in the relationships between the constituent parts of the strategic equations of purpose, force, implementation, and effectiveness, and the linked debates. The domestic and international contexts vary, as do the means of interpretation.

The problem for the historian remains how best to address the complex interactions of change and continuity, structure and conjuncture, the West and the wider world, in order to produce an account that is able to identify and probe crucial issues and key questions. The last must not be forgotten. The past is not unproblematic, and that is certainly true of the trajectory and causation of military development.

I would like to thank Kathryn Barbier, Guy Chet and Peter Lorge for their helpful comments on an earlier draft. I have benefited in developing these ideas from opportunities to speak at Ohio University and the University of Exeter.



2

Modernisation Theory

and (some of) the conceptual flaws of the
Early-Modern Military Revolution

Academic theories in the Humanities and Social Sciences gain traction not because of any inherent intellectual merit but because they are readily usable and very useful. The ‘pull’ dimension, the usefulness of a thesis, and, more especially, its usefulness in a particular context, is one that can be approached in materialist terms, whether filling textbooks and lecture slots or advancing academic careers, but also with reference to the value of an argument at a specific moment. Indeed, from that perspective, it is the unoriginal thesis that generally does best, as ‘thinking within the box’ or, at least, a similar box, helps to make a proposition readily digestible. The ‘push’ dimension is an aspect of the same factors, of material and ideological import. The key one is the ability to appear cutting-edge but in terms that are in practice somewhat predictable.

And so with the idea of an early-modern military revolution, a proposition that drew heavily on already established ideas and literatures of modernisation and, eventually, globalisation. These ideas had a long genesis, but the key origin was that of progress as measured in and by social development, an approach that put to one side religious notions of time as leading toward a millenarian outcome. If Montesquieu, Smith and Robertson are all key names in this intellectual project, it was in practice one of a longer pedigree, with notions of improbability in human life accompanied by that of development. These ideas lent themselves to nineteenth-century interest in scientific formulation and application. Darwinism is part of the mix, as evolutionary ideas provided metaphors and concepts, notably what was to be termed functionalism, in the shape of serving goals necessary for survival and therefore strength.

These ideas affected new developing sciences such as sociology, geopolitics and anthropology, and were brought into academic history through a shared concern with modernity and therefore modernisation. Rational choice

was seen as at play, from biological preference to economic and political practice, but there was a difference between an emphasis on constraints as, with Durkheim or with contingent outcomes, as with Weber. There was a parallel with geographical ideas of determinism or ‘possibilism.’ Weber’s approach to modernity led him to define it in terms of rationality and standardisation, with motivation in terms of instrumental behaviour as opposed to traditional action. Weber also linked the prudent rationality related to capitalism with Protestantism. Taken into American thought by Talcott Parsons, Weber was the forbear of what was to be called the Structural-Functional approach, and Modernisation theory became a key tool in the Social Sciences, a theory emphasising rational abstract principles and an abandonment of past practices. Key texts included Walt Rostow’s *Politics and the Stages of Growth* (1971) and Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), the latter a work propounded around the means, goals and modernity of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. In the 1960s, and again in the 1990s, modernisation was regarded as a form of global New Deal, able to create a new world order, and information and theory were deployed accordingly¹.

Modernisation theory, however, was often advanced with insufficient attention to practicalities, let alone reality, as with the failure to understand Vietnamese society. As a related, but separate point, the attempt to produce ‘modern,’ quantifiable criteria of military success fell foul of the ability of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese to soak up heavier casualties and to defy American equations of success with their emphasis on quantification.² It would be easy to draw a line between these (and other) modernisation writers and the proponents of, and even more response to, the thesis of a military revolution, with Geoffrey Parker in particular offering a parallel account to Fukuyama. While that is apposite, there are other elements of modernisation theory that should first be addressed. A key one was that of secularisation, as

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- 1 M.E. LATHAM, *Modernisation as Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2000) and *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernisation, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, New York, 2011); N. GILMAN, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, Maryland, 2003); D.C. ENGERMAN, ‘American Knowledge and Global Power,’ *Diplomatic History*, 31 (2007), pp. 599-622.
 - 2 G.A. GADDIS, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York, 2011).

again analysis, means and goal of development. Durkheim, Weber and many others argued that modernisation meant a decline in religious practice and significance, and this approach affected a broad tranche of writing in the Social Sciences and Humanities, as well as discussion of historical change.³ The cult of reason, understood as inherently secular, with faith banished to the private sphere, meant that the present necessarily understood the past better than the latter did: reason could reveal the prospectus to a better future and a better-understood past.

A circularity in thought and selectivity in evidence were inherent to this process, and both, indeed, were very much to be seen in the work by the proponents of a military revolution. As far as the first was concerned functions were presented in a quasi-automatic fashion, with needs and drives readily ascribed to states, and effects ascribed to functions while those functions were defined by the effects they produced.⁴

A key aspect of the cult of a modern reason, in terms of secularism and of other elements, is a total failure not only to understand the military cultures of the past (and even arguably the present), but also to appreciate the nature of development. Failing to perceive the values of the past and to understand its practices understandably leads to a neglect of key factors in the evaluation of proficiency, capability and success, both individual and collective. Honour is misleadingly disparaged as conservative if not redundant, and practices of aristocratic officership are misunderstood. A more informed comment can be found in the work of Gregory Hanlon,⁵ and it is instructive that his new book makes scant mention of the military revolution, a thesis that is presented as ‘argued to an indecisive end.’⁶

Revolution was a term in more than fashion in the twentieth century, reflecting not only political commitment, but also that it became the standard way to describe and explain structural change. This practice owed much to

3 For a critique, J.C.D. CLARK, ‘Secularisation and Modernisation: The Failure of a “Grand Narrative,”’ *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 161-94.

4 A. HAWKINS, ‘Modernity and the Victorians,’ unpublished paper. I am grateful to Angus Hawkins for providing me with a copy.

5 See, in particular, G. HANLON, *Italy 1636: Cemetery of Armies* (Oxford, 2016).

6 G. HANLON, *European Military Rivalry, 1500-1750. Fierce Pageant* (Abingdon, 2020), p. xvii.

the industrial revolution, a term first used in 1799, but popularised by Arnold Toynbee in 1881, with significant capitals. This term was much applied thereafter, and was to be the basis for subsequent revolutions, as with the Agricultural Revolution.⁷ It was not therefore surprising that the term was deployed in military history. There were precursors, but the most influential argument was advanced in 1955 by Michael Roberts in a work published in 1956⁸ that liberally employed the idea of fundamental change and the term military revolution, and closed with a clear affirmation of transformation: ‘By 1660, the modern art of war had come to birth. Mass armies, strict discipline, the control of the state, the submergence of the individual had already arrived’ and so on, culminating with ‘The road lay open, broad and straight, to the abyss of the twentieth century.’ With its failure to grasp the nature of pre-1560 or post-1660 warfare, its neglect of navies and the global dimension, its failure to understand the requirements of command, and its simplification and misreading of modern warfare, this was a disappointing piece, a classic instance indeed of footnotes rather than foresight; but it was given publicity, not least in Sir George Clark’s *War and Society in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1958).

Parker was far more impressive with his inclusion of the naval dimension, his wider-ranging chronology, and his engagement with the world scale. Initially Parker focused on the Spanish dimension, but he broadened out with his hugely influential *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1988). That work deserves a careful reading as does the perceptive criticism by a number of scholars including Bert Hall, Kelly DeVries, and David Parrott. It is particularly instructive that Parker addressed the global question, employing ‘the Military Revolution of the sixteenth century’⁹ to in effect explain both the rise (and multipolarity) of the West and why it was to provide the most successful of the ‘gunpowder empires’ to employ a term probed by William H. McNeill. The strengths of Parker’s work can be qualified empirically, not least, but not only, by ques-

7 J.D. CHAMBERS, and G.E. MINGAY, *The Agricultural Revolution* (London, 1966).

8 M. ROBERTS, *The Military Revolution, 1560-1660* (Belfast, 1956).

9 G. PARKER, ‘In Defense of *The Military Revolution*,’ in C.J. ROGERS (ed.), *The Military Revolution Debate* (Boulder, Colorado, 1995), p. 356.

tioning the idea of a three-century revolution, or by reference to the limitations of Western success, the nature of late medieval circumstances, the importance of the post-1660 period, and, despite the brilliance of the footnotes, to the selection and deployment of evidence.

There are also, which is the intention of this note, debatable assumptions in terms of theses of modernisation, and the characterisation of capability. Parker's emphasis on particular notions of proficiency, and his embrace of the proposition of change that is fundamental because described as revolutionary, and described as revolutionary because fundamental, fits within a practice of historical writing that increasingly looks very much that of a particular period. Alluding earlier to Fukuyama was deliberate because there are instructive parallels between the mindsets represented in these two works. Each appears qualified at the very least by the more varied presentation of modern warfare that the subsequent three decades were to offer. Parker very much takes modernisation theory on board: 'the Muslim states ... could no longer meet and defeat the expanding repertory of innovations developed by their Christian adversaries, because the Westernisation of war also required replication of the economic and social structures and infrastructures, in particular the machinery of resource-mobilisation and modern finance, on which the new techniques depended,'¹⁰ which doubtless explains why the United States was invariably successful in the Islamic world over the last two decades, as well as Israel in Lebanon. Instead, it is the specificity of conflict and individual conflicts and the multivalent character of war, that emerge; and the language of modernity, modernisation, and revolution is misleading as an account, narrative and/or analytical, or this phenomenon.

10 PARKER, *Defense*, p. 355.



3

Periodisation and Its Problems in Military History

This article is intended as the start to a debate, that on how best to tackle periodisation in military history. The article will be divided into two sections. The first introduces the main theme, while the second considers the particular example of the eighteenth century which will be shown to be a unit of varied meanings and lengths.

Periodisation is always an issue for historians, not least as both cause and consequence of assumptions and conclusions, that are generally more potent for being unexplained and, indeed, unmentioned. As a result, there is a literature on the subject,¹ although less so explicitly than might be anticipated given the importance of the topic to historians. Cosmologists, geologists and archaeologists think greatly about time as well, but frequently more explicitly so than historians, which is curious

As far as much of the historical discussion of periodisation is concerned, the military dimension is not sufficiently integrated. Moreover, these discussions are apt to focus on language and discourse, rather than reality, and more especially so as part of an historiographical focus on the invention of tradition. The standard discussion is rather on the concept of modernity, than whatever may be taken to mean its reality. Moreover, that discussion does not generally continue to address more particularly the weight attached, in idea and reality, to particular centuries.

1 I would like to thank Charles Coutinho, Robert Crowcroft, Tim May, Claudio Vacanti and Neil York for their comments on an earlier version.

For an introduction, H. NEUHAUS (ed.), *Die frühe Neuzeit als Epoche* (Munich, 2009); R. HUTTON (ed.), *Medieval or Early Modern. The Value of a Traditional Historical Division* (Cambridge, 2015); P. WITHINGTON, *Society in Early Modern England. The Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge 2010).

Any time-based system throws forward a whole series of divisions, and a century is an aggregation of years, thus providing a different origin for periodisation to the notion of modernity which floats more freely. A century, which is derived from an Etruscan concept absorbed by the Romans, emerges therefore as a unit of counting, and that inherently carries with it no meaning: 100 is only one different to 99 and 101, and that is well-within the statistical margins of accuracy and tolerance for many measurements and operating systems; and certainly was for much of the past.

So, our discussion of periodisation in military history perforce divides. First, we will briefly consider the issue of the ex-post-facto discussion of antiquity, medievalism and modernity, then move onto centuries, and then assess the last in terms of the value for military history of the eighteenth century. The divisions between Antiquity and the Middle Ages, between the latter and the Modern Age, and within the latter, have all excited debate, as, indeed, has the notion of distinct periods within Antiquity and the Middle Ages. On the example of archaeological era, such as the Stone Age, there is usually a triangular division, in terms of Early, Mid, and Late, or, in the absence of that, Early and Late. The great advantage of the Early, Mid, and Late distinction is that it opens up the value of periodisation in conceptual terms, with dates applied as descriptors, rather than employing the latter as the basis for the periodisation.

The standard Western narrative was a secular rereading of the Christian timescale. The latter had the era before Christ's mission followed by a period that was a vale of tears until Christ's second coming, with no real distinctions in this period. The secular rereading, not that those involved were not Christian, instead, postponed the millennial end of human time, and conceptualised development during this period. The latter in part was a product of a sense of the separateness of the past from the present,² but that itself did not produce the idea of a linear development through the present to an imagined future, because cyclical theories of time – a return, in the future, to the present – were long more dominant. These made sense of creation and revival myths, of astronomical movements and the seasons,³ and also of the cultural weight

2 Z.S. SCHIFFMAN, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore, MD., 2012).

3 P.J. CORFIELD, *Time and the Shape of History* (New Haven, Conn., 2007).

of the past, as a source of authority and reference.⁴ The latter was crucial to the understanding of battle and, in particular, to the heroic cult of the warrior – as individual or group – and their ability to transcend the boundaries between the human and divine worlds.⁵ The latter provided a providential account for success; not that that prevented the change that was central to the pursuit of best practice⁶ in all respects, including the military. That approach, indeed, continued to be true of the Middle Ages and, with the evidence on will, to the modern day.

Moreover, millennial beliefs did not prevent the argument that it was necessary to think carefully about how choices in the present would work out, which was a means to regard the past as gone. That, however, was lessened by cultural norms of past presence, as with ancestors⁷ as well as the importance of community agencies for the assimilation of information, a process that put an emphasis on the experience of the past and memory. In military terms, this was encouraged by age-related hierarchies. To suggest some abrupt shift to a modernity of empirically-derived, rational assessments predicated on an assumption of transformation through improvement across time, provides a conventional way to approach modernity, and to locate pre-modernity accordingly, but that is both a simplistic, indeed partial, account of the modern, and a caricature of the complexity and achievement of earlier ages.⁸

Contextualising warfare in this fashion is designed not to suggest precise links or exact parallels, although clearly the diffusion of gunpowder technology as linked to technical understanding and aptitude. Nevertheless, the theme is one of change as in interplay with continuity, rather than there being a Hegelian conflict between them. As a secondary point, that makes discussion in terms of military revolutions problematic, but the primary point, therefore, is that change is seen as integral and overall rather than separate

4 A.D. SMITH, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford, 2003).

5 J.E. LENDON, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven, Conn., 2005).

6 M. KEMPSHALL, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400-1500* (Manchester, 2011).

7 P. NABORKOV, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge, 2002).

8 T. STIEFEL, *The Intellectual Revolution in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London, 1985); D.C. LINDBERG and M.H. SHANK (eds), *The Cambridge History of Science, Vol 2, Medieval Science* (Cambridge, 2011).

and zero-sum,, and, therefore, that periodisation in terms of distinct conditions should be both in terms of tendencies and with reference to much time best understood as overlap between these supposed building blocks of particular periods. That observation stands as an appropriate reflection on the situation for military history from the late-medieval period looking forward into the early modern. There has been some, but less, attention to the comparable transition from Antiquity to the Early Medieval, both in terms of overlap, notably in the fifth and into the sixth centuries, and with regard to later continuities, as in the controversial thesis about the Roman antecedents of Carolingian warfare. As so often, it is the point and the frame of reference that is significant. The military history of medieval Europe, each of which are abstractions inviting debate, looks different from Constantinople, Paris and Pomerania in the eighth century. So even more does the standard stadial account of development toward modernity look questionable on a global stage, a point to which we will return when considering the eighteenth century. The imposition of a Western conceptualisation, terminology and timetable on a global analysis can be seen as an aspect of the Rise or Triumph of the West, to employ the capitalisation that, as with the Early Modern Military Revolution, or Total War, or The Revolution in Military Affairs, so-often serves as a substitute for sceptical consideration. There are different ways in which this issue is overcome, the most significant being those of the spread of technology, notably iron weaponry, gunpowder, and steam-transport, but also widespread socio-political changes, such as 'Barbarian invasions' in the fourth and fifth centuries, or fourth to ninth.

These approaches offer an account of a military periodisation that has interest, indeed value, in common themes within a comparative perspective, but they can serve to offer a misleading account of progress in which cleaving to apparent paradigm is deemed necessary and therefore progressive (as well as vice versa). This method dramatically underplays the conditionalities of success and the multiple characteristics of capability, effectiveness, and achievement. Moreover, there can easily be a misleading reading between proficiency at the respective levels of tactical, operational and strategic conflict, again to read in later abstractions. The assumption of the last is a particularly serious problem in the understanding of military history, and not least due to the widespread fascination with weaponry at the expense of other elements, and

of battle instead also of other methods of engagement.

More can be said about the problem of Western-centric⁹ and teleological accounts of warfare, and the related periodisation, notably in the supposed onset of modernity.¹⁰ In particular, it is unclear how best to address the military vitality of non-Western powers and peoples, the success of whom did not, other than in the most selective of readings, depend on adopting Western-style weaponry and organisation. Given that some of the most effective military systems of the period were very different,¹¹ this approach appears especially flawed. For example, assuming that the tripartite division of Antiquity, Medieval, and Modern is useful, the dates for the division are problematic. For East Asia, the dissolution of the Mongol Empire in 1260 might be seen to mark the beginning of the modern period, but Chinese history offers other significant dates. Qualifying a divide with a plus or minus of a few decades does not generally help. Medieval is usually understood as a rough time period, but the meaning applied to the term can vary with the period, and vice versa. If ultimately it is the responsibility of the author to define his/her terminology, what safety is there in numbers?; a question with several meanings.

If periods pose problems, can centuries convince critics? Here one has a differing set of issues, although there are overlaps. In particular, centuries assessed from the birth of Christ are a particularly Western centric system. Moreover, they harden the precision already noted as an issue when addressing periods: a year is either seventeenth or eighteenth century, not both. A century, of course does not have to be the same as a hundred years beginning with the year 1600, 1700 and so on. Indeed, for military historians, one of the most famous centuries is that of 1560-1600, which Michael Roberts had as his epicentre of military revolution. So also for choosing divisions comes most notably 1775, when the American War of Independence began. Centuries may work in broad strokes, but matters do not dramatically change as the calendar does.

9 P. PORTER, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London, 2009).

10 J.M. BLACK, *War in the World: A Comparative History, 1450-1600* (Basingstoke, 2011) and *Beyond the Military Revolution: War in the Seventeenth-Century World* (Basingstoke, 2011).

11 J. GOMMANS, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710-1780* (Leiden, 1995); P.C. PERDUE, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

Centuries, moreover, underline the extent to which all attempts at periodisation are by definition both subjective and arbitrary. For example, one historian may speak of ‘the long eighteenth century’ and another of ‘the long nineteenth century,’ which both draws attention to the classification of the years overlap and of the subjectivity of the very idea of a century. Eric Hobsbawm’s *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (1994) exemplifies this point. This issue is not helped by the question of supposedly decisive or at least significant dates, as if a gunpowder revolution began with the Burgundian defeat at Nancy in 1477, Charles VIII’s invasion of Italy in 1494, the Swiss defeat in 1515, or the French one at Pavia in 1525; each of which anyway is a date of scant significance in a non-Western context. In terms of military history, periodisation is usually tied up with specific battles, but that overplays the importance not only of them but also of battle as a whole.

The eighteenth century, understood as 1700-99 is usually regarded by Western military historians as a period of two uneven parts, each defined by the other: those of ‘ancien regime’ and revolutionary warfare, with a divide at 1775 or, more commonly, 1792 when the French Revolutionary Wars began. The issue of the divide is problematic as there was much continuity across it, notably, but not only, in weaponry, tactical discussion, the organisational structure of most armies, individual careers, transportation, and naval warfare. Leaving that aside for a moment, there is the problem of start and close. *Ancien régime* warfare, however defined, did not begin in 1700 and is commonly dated to the period after the Thirty Years’ War (1618-48) and/or the ‘mid-seventeenth-century crisis.’ The revolutionary period certainly continued to include the Latin American Wars of Independence and might be taken on to encompass the conflicts of the years of revolution in 1830 and 1848. At any rate, the eighteenth century is not a unit as far as a distinctive period of time is concerned.

The same is true of non-Western military history. For China, the formation of a Sino-Manchu hybrid under the new conquering dynasty, puts a divide in the mid seventeenth century, one that lasts until the impact of the British in the First Opium War (1839-42). There is nothing distinctive about the period in Japanese military history, with the breaks there instead at the beginning of the seventeenth century (unification) and the 1850s (Western pressure). In India, the divide is in the 1750s-60s, as that sees two external powers – the

Afghans and the British – become important forces within India, in effect bringing Mughal power down, although the Marathas, while defeated by the Afghans in 1761, were not similarly defeated by the British until 1803. That year, combined with the British destruction of Mysore power in 1799, might appear to offer an alternative division, one moreover corresponding with the end of the century and matching the counterpart provided by the death in 1707 of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Thus, the century becomes that of Mughal decline, which is certainly one theme, or, less confidently, Britain's rise, which was not apparent till the second half of the century.

Caveats can also be offered in the case of the Ottoman (Turkish) empire. [If] it faced repeated defeats from the war of 1683-99 onward, again providing a sense of unity through failure, one that culminated with the Treaty of Jassy in 1792 which left Russia with Crimea, Ochakov and the territory as far as the Dnieper, the situation was less clearcut. Ottoman victories over Russia (1711), Venice (1715), and Austria (1739) were impressive. Again, the direction of traffic was more apparent in the second half of the century. For Persia (Iran), a key break was in 1722 with the overthrow of the Safavids by invading Afghans, but the collapse of Nadir Shah's empire after his assassination in 1747 provided a more clearcut arrival into regional disunity. So also with the rise of regional power in Ethiopia, notably with the success of Mika'el Ras of Gondar in the 1760s and his defeat in 1771.

In these and other cases caveats can be made, but the key point is to identify that there is no common military-historical eighteenth-century space. Indeed, rather than a message, the period becomes a medium, that of an artificial period of time with no one common trajectory.¹² Nor is there a common theme, albeit at a different rate, which was an approach that has been employed in military history. Thus, the major civilisations had military cultures that differed, while within individual cultures there were variations reflecting the interplay of specific challenges with the quality of particular leaders. An action-reaction pattern of development, with fitness for purpose ensuring that successful leaders created opportunities and sought to respond to deficiencies in a dynamic fashion, meant an inherent variety in development. So also with the linkage to political systems that followed particular patterns of leader-

12 J. BLACK, *War in the Eighteenth-Century World* (Basingstoke, 2013).

ship: hereditary command and control was different to meritocratic rulership in terms of the successful warlord seizing power. And so also with the élites in question.

Periodisation with its search for common experiences within and divisions without can capture the impact of the simultaneity of invention or, at least, diffusion and the willingness to copy, as with Western navies in the eighteenth century; but across time, both within and between periods, there was the desire for an edge in battle, and therefore for difference. Moreover, ‘diffusion’ can as much entail adaptation and difference in the shape of anti-weapons and anti-tactics, as copying.

A complex periodisation in terms of the *ancien régime* or, rather, the ‘pre-revolutionary’ situation, makes any discussion of continuity across that divide problematic because it is less clear in practice what changes are being assessed. Ultimately, killing the enemy with as little risk to one’s own life was always uppermost, even in cultures that emphasised the heroism of the individual warrior. More specifically, firepower and cutting/stabbing power were of note in both periods.

Similar points can be made for other periods, and further extended if particular types of warfare are considered. Thus, there is an essential continuity in the eighteenth century for naval warfare, one that is not changed by the American and French Revolutions. Instead, technological transformation in the nineteenth century led to a major discontinuity that created a new period in naval warfare, and one relatively rapidly on a global scale. That does not, however, provide a basis for looking at the earlier situation. In particular, the move toward naval gunnery in European warships in the sixteenth century, while it had some parallels, was not as rapidly effective and did not provide a comparable global model. Moreover, the situation at sea was not a helpful guide to the one on land, and certainly not in periodisation. The proposition that there was a 300-year long military revolution demonstrates this problem of classification by means of a widespread extrapolation of a thesis, while also inviting consideration of how best to group warfare in say 1720-2020, the last three centuries, around one thesis. In short, we have a classic case of the condescension of hindsight: while accepting complexity in the present we down play it for the past. That is as misleading as any use of periodisation, but the latter is a symptom of this situation.

Possibly the answer is a working solution with, crucially, an emphasis on its contingent and subjective character. This would involve generalisation in the manner that best suits the author's ideas of the dynamics of change in a given historical situation. This may be in a sense simplistic and instrumental, but some measuring stick is required to make sense of the voluminous mass of details that comprises history. A variable of this type, especially if not employed in a reductionist fashion, becomes both analytically and descriptively useful, and helps fit the pieces on the chessboard into place. Most crucially, this entails an abandonment of the misleading conceit that particular works and/or approaches are definitive..





4

From Alexander the Great at Issus to Hannibal at Cannae, 333-216 BCE:

Redating the Military Revolution:

A Preliminary Note

No friends, I am not presuming to intrude into the confines of Classical scholarship. My title, instead, comes first from a memorable historical suggestion and secondly from a prism of historical usage. I read Arthur Ferrill's *The Origins of War: From the Stone Age to Alexander the Great* (London, 1985) when it came out but have not looked at it since, but I recall his discussion 'Alexander at Waterloo: His Place in the History of Warfare,' of how Alexander the Great would have done at Waterloo. In part, the discussion rested on the argument that gunpowder weaponry had not revolutionised the earlier usage of missile weaponry, cavalry, and infantry wielding stabbing or cutting weapons. As with all hypotheticals, there is room for debate, but Ferrill captured the compact nature of the relevant battlefields, the tactical consequences of combined-arms fighting, and the significance accordingly of command skills, fighting experience, and morale. So we start at 1815, putting to one side notions that gunpowder had revolutionised warfare as far as battle on land was concerned.

The second reference is to the Prussian-German usage of Hannibal's victory at Cannae (216 BCE) as a model of tactical excellence and therefore success.¹ Of course, we really know relatively little of Hannibal, his plans, allies and resources, how much he had to pay his mercenaries, who financed it, and where the recruits came from. The sources are lacking; but it is the use to which past examples are put that is crucial. Hans Delbrück's account of the battle was highly influential, but so even more was that (influenced by his

1 I am grateful to Charles Coutinho, Kelly DeVries, John France, Peter Lorge, Ciro Paoletti, Mark Fissell, Rick Schneid and Anna Vigdorova for their comments on an earlier draft. A. Goldsworthy, *Cannae: Hannibal's Greatest Victory* (London, 2001); Y. Mosig and I. Belhassen, 'Revision and reconstruction in the Punic Wars: Cannae revisited,' *International Journal of the Humanities*, 4,2 (2006), pp. 103-10.

reading of Delbrück) by Alfred, Count Schlieffen, the Chief of the General Staff from 1891 to 1906. This account was intended both to demonstrate manoeuvre warfare and to provide a basis for military education and thus was studied by Moltke the Younger and others. It was translated into English at Fort Leavenworth. Envelopment was the key idea, one seen with the usage of independently-operating corps by Napoleon and his rivals, as at Leipzig in 1813, with the Prussian success at Sadowa in 1866, and with the would-be German successes in 1914 and 1941. Of course, the Germans triumphed in neither of the latter years, and Cannae, which had a similar culmination, proved a deceptive guide to strategic success.

There were of course major differences. In the Second Punic War, Hannibal ultimately failed because of inadequate numbers of men and siege equipment after Cannae, and a lack of reinforcements thereafter. In the case of 1941, key elements included inadequate intelligence, leading to a serious underestimation of the number and quality of Soviet forces and material; Soviet advantages in troops, space, time, and Allied assistance; Soviet resilience; Germany needing to fight on two fronts; and seriously flawed German strategy and command. Yet again, however, the point is the use of past examples in order to illustrate thought. Delbrück himself favoured comparative approaches as in *Die Perserkriege und die Burgunderkriege* [*The Persian and Burgundian Wars*] (1887) and the better-known *Die Strategie des Perikles erläutert durch die Strategie Friedrichs des Grossen* [*The Strategy of Pericles Described Through the Strategy of Frederick the Great*] (1890).

So, the question here is whether the gap from Waterloo in 1815 considered in terms of Alexander, to Cannae as used by the Prussian-Germans from the late nineteenth century offers a possibility for a discussion of military periodisation, my subject in an earlier piece that focused on the early-modern period. Was there a key transition in the nineteenth century that transformed potential followed by one that went in another direction? Why, if Sadowa brought the decisive overthrow of Habsburg Austrian power by that of Hohenzollern Prussia, was the latter, in subsequent German forms unable to prevail despite major battlefield successes in 1914 and 1941?

At once, this warns us about the problems latent in discussion of period-

sation, some of which we have already considered.² It is worth adding that the linkage of periodisation with a concept of modernisation greatly exacerbates not only the intellectual and methodological problems of periodisation, but also the treatment of particular periods. Thus, to take medieval European warfare, and armour is still widely portrayed for sixteenth-century battles, such as Pavia (1525), the steel-tipped lances and metal or plate armour and helmets of the period would have offered more than the bronze breastplates, sarissas (long spears or pikes) and weak swords of Alexander's men; but that then raises the question of the effectiveness of 1815 musket balls, especially if fired from a distance, on fourteenth-century armour. Might then Alexander's soldiers have felt comfortable at Waterloo, when not facing defensive armour, but less so at Crécy or Agincourt?

This consideration of the relationship between 'medieval' and 'early-modern' can be taken further in the case of Europe by considering whether armour was given up, as it largely was other than for the breastplate and sabre conflict of heavy cavalry, because of the effectiveness of gunpowder.

The effectiveness of firearms, and notably in battlefield conditions other than in ideal circumstances, should not be taken as a revolutionary given. Indeed, the Graz armoury tests suggested that gunshot could not penetrate a breastplate until well into the eighteenth century.³ And the armour worn in World War One was difficult to penetrate, although those wearing it could do anything.

Armour, however, was expensive, and the sixteenth-century rise in population helped make the replacement of troops (who were also easy to train) cheaper than outfitting them with armour. Cost elements remain significant today, as with the American army in Iraq in 2003. Regular soldiers were head-

2 J. Black, 'Modernisation Theory and (some of) the conceptual flaws of the Early-Modern Military Revolution,' *NAM, Antologia Militare*, 1 (2020), no. 3, pp. 3-7. For a liberal progressivism at Christ's College, Cambridge on the part of Jack Plumb, Geoffrey Parker's teacher, to whom Parker referred as having 'such an immense impact,' D. Cannadine, 'Historians in the "Liberal Hour": Lawrence Stone and J.H. Plumb Re-Visited,' *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), pp. 316-54 and 'John Harold Plumb 1911-2001,' in *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows, III, Proceedings of the British Academy*, 124 (2004), pp. 269-309 at 286-96.

3 P. Krenn, P. Kalas and B. Hall, 'Material Culture and Military History: Test-Firing Early Modern Small Arms,' *Material History Review*, 42 (1995), pp. 101-9.

to-toe in Kevlar and drove in armoured vehicles, while the National Guard units lacked body armour and vehicle armour.

In Europe, full plate armour flourished for 150 years after being introduced in the 1430s-40s, well after a century of gunpowder weapons. This underlines the complex relationship between gunpowder and armour, and the need to employ technological arguments with care. Linked to this, gun technology changed very little from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth. The firing mechanism change to flintlock was, as I have argued in earlier work, significant, but matchlocks, invented in the fifteenth century, were still being used in the American Civil War (1861-5), and barrels had not changed at all. Nor was blackpowder changed from about the fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Rifles transformed what had hitherto been true of major clashes: large, densely packed, numbers of men smashing into other masses of men in an open field or firing at each other.

Turning instead to the global scale, we can indeed see a major transformation in the nineteenth century, one that continued into the early twentieth century. This, moreover, opens a way for reconsidering the putative early-modern 'Military Revolution.' Much of the discussion of the latter focuses on tactical firepower, effective fortification, state bureaucratic processes focused on war, and the conquest of large areas of territory by supposedly advanced powers. The empirical, methodological and conceptual flaws in the argument are well-known,⁴ as is the ambiguity of an early modern military revolution when seen from a medieval background.

However, the 'And what came next?' dimension has received insufficient attention. Let us leave aside for the moment the somewhat ragged idea of a military revolution that ends in 1800, an idea that sits uneasily with the notion of another beginning with 'peoples' warfare' from 1775 and/or 1792. That was not an issue that was satisfactorily addressed, except maybe with the subliminal notion that revolution occurred all the time as if it was a condition of modernity and vice versa.

4 See recently, C. Paoletti, 'Military Revolution, Military Evolution, or Simply Evolution,' (Rome, Associazione culturale Commissione Italiana di Storia Militare, 2020) on www.commissionestoriamilitare.it; J.C. Sharman, 'Myths of Military Revolution: European Expansion and Eurocentrism,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 24 (2018), pp. 491-513.

In practice, any reading of Napoleon's campaigns suggested no real sophistication or effectiveness absent from Han China or the Roman Empire, and it was understandable that nineteenth-century commentators should look back for exemplary lessons, a process further encouraged by the reading of the Peloponnesian War. Indeed, that process can be seen in much modern work on supposedly universal characteristics and forms of war, for example that by Victor Davis Hanson, which proved particularly influential in the United States, or the earlier counterpart of John Keegan in Britain.

The ironic point about the so-called early-modern European military revolution is that in so far as it occurred, it did so later than argued. All the criteria advanced by Roberts, Parker and others, are seen better not with aspects of the utilisation of gunpowder, a truly slow-moving process, but rather with changes in the nineteenth century and, notably in its second half. If one century has to be discerned, it is 1850-1950. In part, this is a case of weapons and delivery systems, culminating in bomber offensives, naval conflict beyond the horizon by large air forces, submarine campaigns, and the atom bomb. The use of new elements for warfare, notably air power beyond the earlier, pre-1850s, range of limited ground-based rocketry, was certainly in a different league to anything seen earlier. State mobilisation of manpower, economic and financial resources was magnified in its potential by population growth, industrialisation, growing wealth, urbanisation and transformative changes in communications. Railroads and steamships were important to power projection and logistics.⁵ The rise of nationalism was part of the process. With characteristic complexity, the conjunction of these trends emerged at different times in particular areas, but the relevant spread in time was far less marked than over previous centuries.

The global dimension was also very much changed. By 1800, in total contradistinction to Parker's focus on the percentage of the world's land surface occupied by Europeans, most of the population was not under European control, or threatened with it. Russian sway over the Siberian wastes logged up the square miles, but not much else. The dominant challenger in northern

5 F. Schneid, 'A Well-Coordinated Affair: Franco-Piedmontese War Planning in 1859,' *Journal of Military History*, 76 (2012), pp. 395-425 and the *French-Piedmontese Campaign of 1859* (Rome, 2014), pp. 43-59.

India were the Afghans, not the British, and aside from the Afghans the key players there during the eighteenth century were the Mughals, the Marathas, and the Persians. The Russians had neither retained nor regained Peter the Great's conquests in Iran. The Chinese still controlled both Taiwan and the Amur Valley, whence the Dutch and Russians had been driven respectively in the late seventeenth century. Much of North America was under the claim, but not the control, of European or European-settler powers. In Africa, the Europeans were essentially in a few coastal enclaves, and the Portuguese attempt to go further in Morocco was crushed in 1578, Spanish attacks on Algiers in 1775 and 1784 were repelled, and the headline success of Napoleon in Egypt in 1798 was succeeded by British failure in 1807. Portuguese expansion in Angola and Mozambique had long stalled.

This situation was transformed in the century from the early 1840s (British successes in China and Sind, and against Egypt, and French victory in Morocco in 1844) to 1936 (the Italian conquest of Ethiopia). It was in the years from 1860 to 1936 that European forces entered Beijing, Lhasa, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Damascus and Addis Ababa. Independent states of European origin from Argentina to the United States overcame Native Americans. Traditional enemies of European power were overcome, from the Sumatran Sultanate of Aceh to the Ottoman Empire. Africa was totally partitioned, while Russia took over most of Central Asia.⁶

For these and other reasons, it would be appropriate, if using the term military revolution, to redate it. Doing so serves not only better to understand the history of war in the broadest sense, including state, society and the world system, but also contributes to a reconsideration of the period usually referred to as early-modern. There is a tendency, in which intellectual, academic and other strategies and goals interact, if not combine, to emphasise the modernity of this age, but that is misleading. In many senses, notably organisationally, socially and economically, the period should more appropriately be put with 'the Middle Ages,' leaving 'modernity,' which is growing lengthier and more complex with the passage of time, to begin in the nineteenth century.⁷

6 J. Black, *The Age of Total War, 1860-1945* (Westport, Conn., 2006) and *War in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2009).

7 For preliminary arguments, J. Black, *Eighteenth-Century Europe* (2nd edn, Basingstoke,

That re-dating certainly might help explain the ability to look back when assessing war in the early nineteenth century, including with the assumptions of Clausewitz and Jomini; but also why the model of Cannae subsequently served the Germans poorly. But then again, the Soviet Union in 1941-2 thwarted Germany despite losing major battles, as Rome had also done at Carthage.

The varied, and often contradictory, use of the same examples reminds us of the porosity, mutability, and inherent contradictory character of historical citation, let alone interpretation. Time periods and sub-fields are a fact of life, and periodisation naturally follows in the modern academic world. Apart from the periodisation designed without self-aware self-criticism to valorise a certain perspective such as 'The Rise of the West,' periodisation can help as an artificial tool to aid discussion. Military Revolution(s) thus serves as a point of connection across time periods and places. The disadvantage, however, is that the paradigm creates inherent outcomes, with specific examples apparently reifying the paradigm. The Military Revolution as a concept then starts to be operated much like Marxist history, which possibly helps to explain its popularity.

Alongside the allegedly transformative change that so often fascinates historians, there was repeatedly continuity in military affairs. An important example qualifies the concept that the key change was from part-time forces dominant in the post-Roman period to permanent ones. Instead, the very use, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of reservists and of large-scale expansion in army size for wartime was another version of earlier practices. This was understandably so, as fitness for purpose, the motivation for essentially *ad hoc* responses by existing forces and institutions to particular needs and opportunities, did not generally occur in the paradigm-destroying fashion and manner of abrupt substitution seen with a revolution; and should not be presented by historians as such, however convenient it might be for their intellectual strategies and academic careers.

1999) and *Kings, Nobles and Commoners. States and Societies in Early Modern Europe. A Revisionist History* (London, 2004).

Lastly consider the following:

‘their young men from their past observations express no very respectable opinion of our manner of fighting them, as, by our close order, we present a large object to their fire, and our platoons do little execution ... though they acknowledged our troops thereby show they are not afraid, and that our numbers would be formidable in open ground, where they will never give us an opportunity of engaging them.’

Afghanistan 2020? Germany 9? No, Governor William Bull of South Carolina in 1761 reporting on Anglo-American prisoners released by the Cherokees.⁸ So often, it is the continuities that are of note.



⁸ Bull to General Amherst, 15 Ap. 1761, London, National Archives, Colonial Office papers, 5/61 fol. 277.

5 Logistics

A Cinderella subject, logistics is more usually cited than discussed at length. Moreover, there is only limited theoretical discussion of logistics. The intention here is to offer a conceptual introduction that is designed to begin a debate. This is emphatically a sketching out of ideas that I have been considering for years, as well as an invitation to contributions by others. I have already advanced in this journal a thesis about the flaws of modernisation as a conceptual approach to military history, and have done the same more specifically in my *Military Strategy: A Global History* (2020). That therefore provides a basis for a reconsideration of logistics, and notably so in terms of the idea that, rather than improvement through time, you have adaptation with reference to fitness for purpose, the fitness provided by task, environment and means, the last involving political culture and related military systems, as much as sources of supply. The recent and continuing war in Afghanistan provides an example of means being dictated by political culture as much as supply.

This contextual approach is a matter therefore of specificities, rather than some linear development, and administrative organisations and practices take on their value in terms of the ability to respond to these specificities, and not in accordance with a model assessed with reference to an asserted universal or quasi-universal value and applicability. The emphasis on specificity includes that of the context of subsequent scholarly assessment, an assessment so often delivered in terms of judgment, as in x was backward and y impressive, with the scale somehow again of universal validity in both time and space. Instead, in addition to the issues involved in response to logistical practice to past circumstances comes those of response in the assessment of logistics to subsequent political assumptions.

The key one at stake is the argument that provision by the state was inherently more rational, easier to plan and to coordinate with the armed forces and, therefore, better. This was very much the argument seen with war as national mobilisation, and also with authoritarian and totalitarian states. Moreover, the response to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has thrown to the fore the question

of the respective value of dictatorial and democratic societies, and has done so in a fashion that is widely critical of the free nature of globalising exchanges. That approach, however, does not necessarily mean that authoritarian systems (and also militarised or, at least, military-led) are more appropriate at present, nor necessarily in the past. The two points are not co-determinant; but it would be naïve to believe that they are not linked in assessment by scholars and others.

This issue raises another point about logistics which is the extent of the supply system that is in discussion. Is it a case simply of the provision of supplies, generally food, fuel and munitions, to the military in the field, with, in addition, for modern armies medical support and maintenance facilities, especially for the heavy, vehicles, aircraft and helicopters on which Western armies currently rely so heavily. If so, how pertinent is it to keep the supply of manpower separate, as recruitment does not exhaust that subject, and nor, anyway, should it be kept separate. Battle casualty replacements are an increasingly important aspect of logistics, as they were in both the world wars. Supply in the field is but part of a supply system and, therefore, logistics is as much to do with food, fuel and weaponry provision as part of general preparedness, as it is to do with campaigning availability. In theory, there is a distinction, but, in practice, this availability depends on the preparedness and cannot readily be detached from it.

Moreover, this point interacts with the differing levels of war, notably tactical, operational and strategic. The last includes the general point about resource availability being a key element of logistics, and thereby directs the subject from the operational support-for-a-campaign level that appears to be all-too-common as the sole discussion of logistics when the subject is discussed. In practice, the tactical level is generally the most significant, but also the one that receives least attention. In part, this is because the source level is weakest, not least as, across history, there was frequently a poor level of institutional provision and, instead, a focus on *ad hoc* responses. The consequences are that much of the discussion of the tactical level focuses on activities aimed at the acquisition of supplies that were short-term and specific to the spot. The most significant were obtaining food and forage at the roadside, a practice that could be extended to include money, sex, and other goods and services that were seized, obtained, or purchased; and the processes involved

frequently overlapped and leave scant account in the literature. This was not only a matter of supplying units on the move but also stationary ones, including garrisons.¹ In the latter case, there was not the prospect of depredations in new areas, but, instead, often the need to provide a system of some regularity. This was an element of the predictability that aided units, not least by diminishing the need for the search for supplies.

However, to argue therefore that a more systematic provision of supplies was required in order to ‘free’ troops from this search is both to downplay the operational, strategic and political value of this activity, in weakening opponents and corroding their willingness to fight, and also to imply that such a systematic provision was both possible and cost-efficient in terms of the resources available. That might have been the case, but was not necessarily so.

There was also the element of seizure and/or purchase as aspects of a free, or rather freer, market provision that captures the role of raw enterprise in the system. That was more the case at the tactical than the operational level, but, nevertheless, was found at the latter. The system of coerced contribution by the local population is particularly well-documented during the period of the Anglo-French Hundred Years War (1337-1445) where the system of ‘appatis’ was fundamental to the support of units both in royal employment or acting in a mercenary capacity, and also in Italy after 1360 where a similar system was used by the early *condottieri* bands, and not surprisingly as many had fought in France prior to the Treaty of Bretigny of 1360.

In terms of the emphasis on cultural spaces or strategic cultures, there is also the need to understand that functional best-practice accounts of logistics have to yield to the specificities of particular understandings of appropriate and necessary conduct. This covers the entire ground from looting to sustenance levels, and thus undermines abstractions such as sixteenth-century logistics or, even, French sixteenth-century logistics, because what was the desired and/or acceptable practice in civil warfare, and notably in suppressing heterodox rebellion, was different to that in fighting abroad.

1 I would like to thank Kelly DeVries, John Lynn, Kaushik Roy, Mark Stevens and Claudio Vacanti for their comments on an earlier draft.

G. SATTERFIELD, *Princes, Posts and Partisans: The Army of Louis XIV and Partisan Warfare in the Netherlands, 1673-1678* (Leiden, 2003).

Once the element of specific strategic culture is pushed to the fore, then the narrative of technological change is at least qualified. It is of course useful to see how parameters changed with steam power or the internal combustion engine or aircraft, but that can provide a horizontal (or over-the-horizon look) that says little about the reasons for choosing or accepting particular outcomes, both in terms of the politics of control sought and with reference to the use of technological possibilities. With the politics of control, it is not solely a matter of the relationship with civilians, both in the sphere of combat and in the metropole, but also the nature of control over armed forces, an element that has varied greatly. Logistical capability can be related to the conditionality of service.

Here, indeed, there is the issue of present-day variety, for the logistics of today are as much a matter of American troops eating standard rations across the world as of warlords in the Central African Republic supporting their militias. Whatever our preferences, one form is not more fundamental nor progressive than another. Each represent a response to circumstances. Access to weapons and money is an aspect of power whatever the logistical system, and so also with the patronage that is deployed through the provision of military support.² The access and patronage frequently interact to determine not simply the operation of the logistical system but also the system itself. The confusion of the present can be readily extrapolated to include the past, and it is disappointing that that has not become more common as a replacement for a unitary model of historical development.

These points do not exhaust the range of theoretical reflections. Others of note include the contrast between land and naval logistics, again understood as a response to specific requirements, and the discussion of scale. As a last point, the idea of development through time needs to address the question of whether Han China or Classical Rome should be considered less impressive than later³ or modern counterparts; and the same for 'non state actors' of the period. And on sea as well as land, so with the complex logistics involved in

2 D. PARROTT, *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2012); G. ROWLANDS, *The Dynastic State and the Army under Louis XIV: Royal Service and Private Interest, 1661-1701* (Cambridge, 2002).

3 P.C. PERDUE, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

the mobilisation of Mediterranean galley fleets from Antiquity to the seventeenth century,⁴ as with the crucial role for the logistics of the Rome fleet in the First Punic War of Syracuse and Sicilian allies.

Much of the standard work deals essentially with the last half-millennium,⁵ although one valuable collection looked more widely,⁶ and there is a wealth of recent material on medieval Europe.⁷ The logistic imperatives of warfare in pre-modern times are discussed by contemporaries, including Vegetius, Xenophon and Froissart. Nevertheless, as a consequence, in particular of generally leaving out the Ancient World and often non-Western societies, perceptions about modernity, periodisation, the value of societies that keep records, notably statistical ones, and technological triumphalism, all play a role. At the same time, Operational Research and management theory both came to play a more pronounced part. This was taken further forward in the 1980s when the entire American approach to ‘preparation’ and supply was rethought under the label of ‘sustainability.’ The long wars the Americans fought in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan helped refine their logistical practices and concepts, although without matching success in understanding and thwarting those of their opponents. The study of the latter is less well-developed, although impressive work does exist.⁸

Yet, aside from the flaws in this approach, not least as far as the modern world was concerned, there has been a failure to feed into the general account the perceptions gained from excellent research in the Ancient world and the Middle Ages, notably regarding the logistic support of the Crusader States and the Mamluks, including the fleets that supported them.⁹ They necessari-

4 J. Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War Studies in Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649-1571* (Cambridge, 1988).

5 M. VAN CREVELD, *Supplying War. Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge, 1977).

6 J. LYNN (ed.), *Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare From The Middle Ages to the Present* ((Boulder, Col., 1993).

7 See, in particular, J. HALDON, *General Issues in the Study of Medieval Logistics: Sources, Problems and Methodologies* (Leiden, 2006); J. PRYOR (ed.), *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades* (Aldershot, 2006); HALDON, V. GAFFNEY, G. THEODOROPOULUS and P. MURGATROYD, ‘Marching across Anatolia: Medieval Logistics and Modeling the Mantzikert Campaign,’ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 65/66 (2011-12), pp. 209-35.

8 T. FARRELL, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001-2014* (London, 2017).

9 L. LORETO, *Per la storia militare del mondo antico* (2006), pp. 97-107.

ly subvert standard chronologies of modernisation. Moreover, the ability of states with very different technologies, for example the Inca empire with its lack of horses and oxen (llamas were not an adequate substitute), requires an unpicking of the idea that modern societies are necessarily more effective.

Of course, the scale of activity is very different in the modern world, where there are close to 8 billion people, and where the emphasis on range in capability and rapidity in action is unprecedented. Thus, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, major organisations had to transform their businesses literally overnight as their supply chain altered in all respects. Many, but not all, had the inbuilt capability to transform, adapt, direct and manage such change from within existing resources and capability.

The management of complexity is terribly difficult today, but that also throws light on the situation in earlier societies where the risk element was, in addition, greatly complicated by the frictions of distance and by the difficulties of countering unpredictabilities in travel, weather and disease, unpredictabilities against which defence mechanisms were generally weaker than today. This brings up the issue of comparative tolerances, in terms of both functionality and attitudes. The logistic support of the Viet Minh forces during the siege of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 was a masterpiece of strategic, operational and tactical planning, and was the battle-winning factor which forced the French to negotiate.

Comparative tolerances are also important for irregular warfare, a type of warfare that has to be hardwired into any analysis of logistics, both as a valid form of conflict (and at tactical, operational and strategic levels) and as one that should not be treated as a reversionary proposition in military history, one of the shadows of primitive practice and failure, but, instead, as a valid form with its own logistical contexts and requirements. This approach can then be taken forward to note that most 'warriors' on land today are not in regular armies, but in a range of organisations with different purposes, from neighborhood protection to criminality.

The functional account, as deployed by stadial writers in the eighteenth century, argues that, while the agricultural surplus and taxation base of settled agrarian societies permitted the development of logistical mechanisms to support permanent specialised military units, many societies lacked such units,

and often had far less organised logistical systems. In war, the latter peoples and others lacking a defined state system often relied on raiding their opponents, and generally sought to avoid battle; although there was also frequently endemic violence between villages, clans and tribes. As a result, ‘little war’ set the dynamics of a logistical context in which specialised units and their particular requirements were not to the fore, a situation that continues to be the case. However, whether this will end up as the major strand in military history is unclear, but it is certainly one for which evidence is weakest, and notably so if statistical. As a result, anthropology can sometimes offer a better understanding of the dynamics of the system, and necessarily so if considered across much of the world.

Rather than thinking in terms of one or the other, hybrid systems have been the norm, and can be seen in particular with nomadic peoples who became imperial, notably the Mongols; and also with those offering a full-spectrum military system encompassing a marked variety of tasks. Mongol logistical support was highly effective because, in the early stages of imperial conquest, it reflected and mirrored the normal nomadic state. Indeed, the integrated logistic support inherent in the armies from the central steppes was unsurpassed at the time. Different methods, however, had to be pursued by the Mongols as tasks changed, not least the lengthy sieges required for the conquest of China in the thirteenth century. A density of resource was then at issue, and had to be deployed accordingly. At the same time, this indicated the logistical flexibility of Mongol warmaking, a factor later seen also with Timur (Tamerlane), who was more successful than his impressive Ottoman rival.

Logistical difficulties tended to rise with the number of troops but, in turn, that has to be considered in terms of resource availability. Food-surplus and food-deficit areas existed across history with implications not only for the ability to wage war but also for the relevant logistical organisation and historical evidence. Thus, in China and India, due to available demographic and agrarian resources, most of the activities related to feeding soldiers and animals were outsourced to local village authorities and merchants. As a consequence, there is a lack of state-generated documentation. In the late seventeenth century, the Mughals in 1664 could dispatch a field force of 50,000 men from Agra to Chittagong, the same distance as from London to Leningrad, but without needing to establish magazines to support the army. This was not because

the Mughals were backward, but, rather, as there was no need to do so. In India, there were specialised guilds, temples and mobile traders or banjaras who supplied armies. In the late eighteenth century, the British introduced the state-commissioned magazine system and destroyed these mechanisms.

Far from the number of troops being no longer an issue, the reduction in the size of armies over the last thirty years in part reflects the logistical burden (in terms of cost) of paying and supporting large numbers. Yet, as a reminder of the need to consider a range of factors when advancing causes in any period or aspect of military history, the same reduction can be attributed to the end of the Cold War or, indeed, to the greater emphasis on high-tech weaponry. The latter itself poses different issues of supply, trained manpower and expensive, and specialised spare parts might appear to be the obvious ones, but, in addition, there is the degree to which the very cost of units reduces the logistical burden by ensuring that fewer are used or risked, whether cruise missiles or stealth bombers.

Logistical burden can also be assessed in terms of the cost to society of the military. There is no fixed answer, and in functional, cultural, ideological and political terms, this cost can be judged to be too great. That opens up another approach to logistics, namely the counter-intuitive one that, for these reasons that being a 'weak' military system, with many frictions in terms of its need to consent, could be important to success. This might particularly be true of winning support in civil wars, for example backing for the Continental Army in America during the War of Independence. Yet, this need for consent could also be a factor in conflicts between states. Moreover, this could be true both of the home-population and of that being invaded. Where, in contrast, logistics was 'effective,' that might lead to a burden judging excessive, thus triggering resentment and rebellion, as the British discovered in America in the 1770s. However, the Chinese state proved more effective in the First Jinchuan War (1747-9) with, as a witness noted, small boats, horses and mules seized, and blacksmiths compelled to cast new cannon.¹⁰

Another form of conditional effectiveness rested on the credibility of a

¹⁰ R. ENTENMANN (ed.), 'Andreas Ly on the First Jinchuan War in Western Sichuan, 1747-1749,' *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal*, 19 (1997), pp. 11, 15.

power, in the literal sense of the credit it could wield.¹¹ In the summer of 1676, John Ellis, visiting William III's forces besieging French-held Maastricht, noted peasants bringing in forage and wood 'as to a mart.'¹² That clearly meets modern expectations more than the French method that September of sending out raiders, burning down houses, taking prisoners, and extorting contributions of supplies to support their garrison. The Dutch forbade their subjects to pay these contributions and, as a result of the non-payment, the French executed the hostages the following May.

A clear instance of brutal inefficiency in modern eyes, but if a state has limited credit-worthiness, and that is a classic friction, it needed to rely on force or the threat of force in order to raise supplies. Weakness, or an inevitable aspect of the difficulties of securing consent and of the exercise of power? Logistical capability is not easy to measure and predatory accumulation does not have to rely simply on centralised direction and provision.¹³ Care is required before assuming a process of development improvement to the present, in particular through a nationalisation of control and provision in the late nineteenth century. The extent to which the modern state itself is also a coalition of interests, and with an international supply chain, suggests caution on this head.

11 J. BLACK, *War in Europe: 1450 to the Present* (London, 2016). See the work coming out from 'The European Fiscal-Military System 1530-1870' project, including access through the website, <https://fiscalmilitary.history.ox.ac.uk/home>, P. Wilson 2017 lecture, 'Competition through Cooperation: The European Fiscal-Military System,' and his 'Foreign military labour in Europe's transition to modernity,' *European Review of History*, 27 (2020), pp. 12-32.

12 London, National Archives, State Papers, 84/202 fol. 128.

13 S. P. REYNA, 'The Force of Two Logics: Predatory and Capital Accumulation in the Making of the Great Leviathan, 1415-1763,' in REYNA and R. E. DOWNS (eds), *Deadly Developments: Capitalism, States and War* (Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 23-68.



6

Logistics and the Path to Military Modernity

Britain and the crucial advantage of naval strength, 1793-1815

* I have benefited greatly from the comments of Mike Duffy and Roger Knight on an earlier draft.

The apparent route to military modernity underlines the teleology offered by those who discern military revolutions. The problems posed by this thesis are readily apparent, not only in terms of an analysis of past periods, events and developments, but also with reference to the far greater complexity of modernity than is generally assumed.¹ The capacity of the state to delimit, control, direct and support war is generally a key element of the historical equation as far as modern scholars are concerned, although that approach ironically leaves unclear how best to handle the very contemporary nature of different practices across the world. The latter, indeed, encourages a reading of the past that subverts the standard usage of the terms modern, modernity and modernisation. Furthermore, some important scholarly work has redirected attention to the deficiencies of past states. This is especially notable with the work of David Parrott, particularly his *Richelieu's Army: War, Government and Society in France, 1624-1642* (2002) and *The Business of War. Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (2012), which very much undermined not only standard discussion of the French army in the seventeenth century but, more generally, the flimsy construction of the hypothetical early-modern European military revolution.²

Turning to a more recent era, the emphasis for the *Wehrmacht* on its dependence on horses very much undercuts the usual view of its armoured prowess. Most of its army was singularly unmechanised. This contrast is more generally applicable when considering all militaries, not least supposedly cutting-edge ones. There is a tendency to focus on the 'tip' rather than the bulk of a military. The *Wehrmacht* is further instructive due to the many limitations of the German war effort, including a weak logistical basis, notably, but not only,

1 Similar work is urgently needed on some of the non-Western militaries of the period.

J. BLACK, *Rethinking Military History* (London, 2004).

2 J. BLACK, *War in Europe, 1450 to the Present* (London, 2016).

for fuel, a poor grasp of coalition warfare, inadequate strategic understanding and processes, and a reliance on a predatory economics. Among supposedly cutting-edge militaries, none of these factors was unique to the *Wehrmacht*. Indeed, they can all be seen in the case of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

Alongside an emphasis on deficiencies, it is important to note that most military activity is a matter of managing weaknesses as well as risk. Indeed, weakness does not necessarily lead to failure, a point that is instructive when discussing the methodology of assessing capability. Similarly, failure does not automatically demonstrate weakness. As well as deficiencies, it is appropriate to assess strengths. In this short paper, I wish to consider the case of British army logistics in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, in which Britain fought from 1793 to 1802, 1803 to 1814, and in 1815. Logistics is not necessarily fundamental to success, but it is a crucial enabler and it brings together strategic, operational and tactical capabilities and effectiveness; and to a degree that many of the factors that attract attention do not match.

The contrast in that period between France and Britain can be given a greater resonance by comparing it with that in the Second World War between Britain and America on the one hand and the Axis powers on the other. Key elements included more effective alliance coordination, a greater ability to innovate and implement the results, as well as better inter-service co-operation at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. The strength of maritime systems was a key element. That raises the inevitable question of how best to place the achievement of the Soviet Union in World War Two and of Russia in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In part, this was a matter of financial and economic help in both from the maritime ally (allies), notably with weaponry in World War Two, as well as the impact on Germany of diverting the *Luftwaffe*, and related industrial production, to home defence. So also with the use of British subsidies to help Austria, Prussia, Russia and other allies in the period 1793-1815. The ability to do so rested on the sophistication and strength of British public finances, and on a maritime economy that drew on naval power and a hard-won dominance. This situation represented a continuance of a pattern going back to 1688, one that undermines the supposed novelty of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period.

Thus, it is the range, and capability within that range, of British warmaking as opposed to that of France, that commands attention. This was certainly apparent with logistics during the period 1793-1815. The logistical challenge facing the British army was greater than that facing any other army due to the variety and range of British commitments. Alongside rivalry with expenditure on the Royal Navy, there were competing challenges for army activity, notably security in the British Isles, conflict with other powers in Europe, trans-oceanic conflict with European powers on land, and conflict with non-European powers. Between 1793 and 1815, the areas in which the army operated included the British Isles, North America, the West Indies, South America, Cape Town, Egypt, Iberia, Italy, the Low Countries, Denmark, India, and the East Indies. There was no single organisation overseeing this variety, not only due to the inherited structures of British administration, but also because of the need for, and practice of, autonomy on many distant stations. This was especially the case with India where the East India Company played a major role.

Furthermore, the extent of co-operation with the navy on trans-oceanic expeditions and amphibious operations was such that the value of differentiating army from navy should not be pushed too hard. So also with the inherited organisational structure. Thus, the Board of Ordnance provided gunpowder for both army and navy. The Navy's Victualling Board had responsibility for provisioning all overseas expeditions and it was far more experienced and efficient, and less corrupt, than the Army Commissariat.

At the same time, bureaucratic practices and possibilities were not static. The rise of the War Office, under the Secretary at War, from 1783, especially under Henry, 3rd Viscount Palmerston (later Prime Minister) from 1809, and, above him, under the Secretary of State for War after 1793 provided a larger and more effective bureaucracy for the conduct of overseas operations. The Secretary of State for War had the real power, although the army commander-in-chief, situated in the Horse Guards, administered personnel.³ This process of administrative reform was taken further from 1806 with the appearance of the first of a number of reports by the newly-established Commission of Military Enquiry.

3 R.J.W. KNIGHT, *Britain against Napoleon: the Organisation of Victory, 1793-1815* (London, 2013), p. 104.

The key means of logistics was not administrative structures, but money. This was crucial for funding activity, both in Britain and abroad, notably in the important Indian military labour market. Unlike in the War of American Independence (1775-83), when it was restricted to defending Gibraltar against siege, there was large-scale conflict in Europe. The British contested the French advance and presence on the European mainland, most obviously, although not only, in the Low Countries (1793-5, 1798-9, 1809, 1813-15), Southern Italy (1806), Iberia (1808-13), and France (1813-15). There was no inherent military need for such a policy, and certainly so in terms of defending Britain from invasion, but successive ministries felt it necessary to demonstrate to actual and potential allies that the British could challenge the French on land. This was crucial to coalition warfare: as in 1942-4, allies frequently demanded a second front to divert French troops away from the Eastern Front and, equally, Britain needed such a statement of strength to ensure a bargaining place at the subsequent peace conference.

As a consequence, the percentage of defence spending devoted to land service rose from an average of 32 per cent in 1784-92 to 51 per cent in 1793-1802 and 57 per cent in 1803-15,⁴ although, in part, this rise reflected the limited possibilities for expanding expenditure on the navy, given the number of sailors that could be raised and the absence of a naval equivalent of the large forces in British pay. Naval manpower peaked at 147,000 in 1813, and was at about that level from 1809.⁵ There was not much point in building very large warships at the end of the war, since there were no significant enemy warships at sea, although Britain was building small warships for trade protection right up to the end. But the shortage of skilled seamen was the real issue and naval commanders could have done with more men.⁶

There are problems with the analysis of available figures, as the army expenditure was always swelled by the inclusion of the subsidies transferred to Continental powers, which has led to conclusion. Most of the heavy gun ordnance expenditure went towards naval guns, so that it is difficult to calculate

4 David FRENCH, *The British way in warfare 1688-2000* (London, 1990), pp. 91, 117.

5 N.A.M. RODGER, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain II: 1649-1815* (London, 2004), p. 639.

6 KNIGHT, *Britain*, pp. 437-8.

‘land service’ expenditure. The figures for 1812 presented to Parliament in 1813, offer the figure:

Services	Expenditure	Percentages
Army (a)	£24,987,362	50.2%
Ordnance	£4,252,409	8.5%
Navy	£20,500,339	41.2% ⁷
Total	£49,740,110	100.0%

(a) Continental subsidy of £5,315,528 already taken out

Wartime public spending was certainly unprecedented, rising from an average annual expenditure in millions of pounds of 14.8 (1756-63) and 17.4 (1777-83), to 29.2 million in 1793-1815, a figure that was higher in the later years. These figures were even more striking given the limited inflation of the period and the degree to which liquidity was far lower than in a modern economy.

The supply requirements of the forces of Britain and her allies were considerable. Operations at a distance exacerbated the situation, although it was not new. In 1760, the munitions to be sent to South Carolina, then involved in conflict with the Native Americans, included 36,000 musket cartridges and ball, and 3,600 flints.⁸ In 1780, when the British had many other commitments in the War of American Independence, by then a world war, the force on St Lucia, recently conquered from the French, submitted a request for 1,800 spades, 800 pickaxes, 800 hand-hatchets, 500 wheelbarrows, 600,000 musket cartridges, 200,000 flints, 2,400 cannon shot, 12,000 barrels of powder, 50 tons of musket balls, 366 reams of musket cartridge cases, and four light six-pounders on travelling carriages.⁹ Artillery was especially demanding. In 1809, 46 British guns fired 4,000 shot and 10,000 shells in attacking the French on Martinique.¹⁰

The sources from the period make clear the burden, one that called on the resources of the revolutions of the period, industrial, agricultural and trans-

⁷ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 26 (1813), columns 23-4.

⁸ NA. (London, National Archives), WO. (War Office papers) 34/84 fol. 44.

⁹ NA. WO. 34/126 fols. 86-7.

¹⁰ R.N. BUCKLEY (ed.), *The Napoleonic War Journal of Captain Thomas Browne 1807-1816* (London, 1987), p. 87.

port. At the risk of being difficult, if the term revolution is to be applied to warfare, and that is problematic for a number of reasons, then the 'early modern military revolution,' a concept incidentally that means little or nothing in many national historiographies, should be focused on the British army/navy capability, which properly developed only after the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688-9 and did not become clearly effective until the Seven Years' War of 1756-63.¹¹

In late 1805, Robert, Viscount Castlereagh, the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in 1805-6 and 1807-9, noted that the Ordnance was to provide 10,000 muskets to the Hanoverians; three years later, his correspondence covered such items as the dispatch of 300 artillery horses to the British army in Portugal and the 'half-yearly delivery of shoes to the army at home.'¹² Vast amounts of munitions were sent to allies. At the end of 1813, Castlereagh announced in Parliament that 900,000 muskets had been sent to the Continent in that year alone. The Portuguese army was pretty well-equipped entirely by equipment from Britain.¹³

The burden of the Peninsular War was particularly notable. Supplies dispatched in 1811 included 1,130 horses at the beginning of the year, clothes for 30,000 Portuguese troops, 46,756 pairs of shoes in July and August, and two portable printing presses. The costs of the Peninsular commitment mounted from £2,778,796 in 1808, to £6,061,235 in 1810, plus another £2 million in Ordnance stores and in supplies in kind. Rising costs reflected increased commitments, the dispatch of more troops, and the reestablishment of the Portuguese army with British assistance and leadership; and this expenditure led to pressure for victory, or for the cutting or withdrawal of British forces.

Britain moved from the obligation of supporting the defence of Portugal to that of seeking to overthrow the French in Spain, which was the major theme from 1812. Obligated to fight in allied countries, and, thus, unable to requisition supplies, Arthur Wellesley, later 1st Duke of Wellington, needed hard cash, but, by 1812, his shortage of money was a serious problem: the troops had

11 R. HARDING, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830* (London, 2003).

12 Castlereagh to Colonel J.W. Gordon, 17 Oct. 1805, 20 Nov. 1808, London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts, vol. 49480 fols 6, 58-9.

13 KNIGHT, *Britain*, pp. 410, 422-3, 425.

not been paid for five months. When campaigning abroad, it was necessary to pay troops and foreign suppliers in British bullion, the reserves of which fell rapidly. As a result, going off the gold standard was, like the introduction of income tax, a key element in the strengthening of the logistical context and in the strategic dimension to logistics. Due to the length of the commitment, the government faced particular difficulties in meeting Wellington's demands for funds.¹⁴

Resources from Bengal made this issue less serious in India. The British came in India to apply power in a systematic fashion, and theirs was not an army that dispersed in order to forage or to pursue booty. Appointed Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief in India in late 1790, Charles, Viscount Cornwallis swiftly wrote to General Sir William Medows, who had failed to defeat Tipu Sultan of Mysore earlier that year:

'I conceive that we can only be said to be as nearly independent of contingencies, as can be expected in war, when we are possessed of a complete battering train, and can move it with the army; and whilst we carry a large stock of provisions with us, that ample magazines shall be lodged in strong places in our rear and at no great distance from the scene of our intended operations... I hope that by a systematic activity and vigour, we shall be able to obtain decided advantage over our enemy before the commencement of the ensuing rains.'¹⁵

As a reminder of the range of logistics, these issues were very different from the use of wayside grass for draught animals, a long-established usage that was an instance of an ability to use local resources that was not fully matched in the case of fleets although they did make use of their facility to fish. Moreover, draught animals posed problems. For a while, the British were unable to move their battering train and provisions efficiently because of their lack of understanding of the quality of bullocks necessary for military purposes, and it was only their capture of Tipu Sultan's breeding stock of bullocks in

14 NA. WO. 6/35, pp. 118-19, 5, 17, 331, 54-9, 75-9; C.D. HALL, *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War 1803-1815* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 20-1; F.O. CETRE, 'Beresford and the Portuguese army, 1809-1814,' in A.D. Berkeley (ed.), *New Lights on the Peninsular War* (Almada, 1991), pp. 149-56.

15 Cornwallis to Medows, 4 Jan. 1791, London, National Archives, Cornwallis papers, PRO 30/11/173 fols 43, 45.

Mysore in 1799 that gave them more mobility.¹⁶

Army administration employed both officials and independent entrepreneurs, such as Indian *brinjarries* who wandered round with bullocks and rice looking for armies to supply. Finance was a key element, and ensured that the British army was not one that dispersed in order to forage and ravage, or a force that had to be held together by booty, and that thus dedicated itself to the strategy of pillage. Logistics were a factor at the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war.

Like John, 1st Duke of Marlborough in the War of the Spanish Succession, Wellington employed a magazine system, as opposed to the process of requisition pursued by the French, but this system relied on support from the host nation, whether Portugal or Spain, as well as a Commissariat that worked for the benefit of the men and not for the system or themselves. This required Wellington being able to hold the Commissariat's feet to the fire, which was called 'Tracing the biscuit.'¹⁷

A persistent problem, more serious than that of personalities, was provided by the convoluted command and administrative system of the army, a system that evolved in the eighteenth century as a means to prevent the army from overextending itself in politics. The Commissariat came under the Treasury and the Commissariat General, and the latter's large host of deputies and assistants, were inevitably under pressure from Whitehall. Wellington did not seek to circumvent this, but he made it clear that what he ordered was what he required. He sacked a few Commissariat generals, and other close personal staff, before getting the men he wanted.

In the face of Treasury pressures, the Secretary at War, like his boss the Secretary for War, could provide Wellington with help, but the Secretary for War was extremely busy as he also had the colonies as well to contend with from 1801. Palmerston was Secretary at War from 1809 to 1828, having been a Junior Lord of the Admiralty from 1807 to 1809. Aside from Castlereagh, senior politicians held the rank of Secretary for War, including Henry Dundas,

16 R.G.S. COOPER, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India: The Struggle for Control of the South Asian Military Economy* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 65.

17 William REID, 'Tracing the Biscuit: The Commissariat in the Peninsular War,' *Militaria. Revista de Cultura Militar*, 7 (1995), pp. 101-8.

William Windham, and, in 1809-12, Robert, 2nd Earl of Liverpool before he went on to become Prime Minister. Wellington complained about Liverpool who was succeeded for 1812-27 by Henry, Earl Bathurst, whose tact kept the lid on Wellington whose complaints were beyond strident. Successive ministers did their best to keep Wellington supplied.¹⁸

There were also structural problems in the role of the Transport Board, which was the key body in the planning and execution of expeditionary warfare. Economy and efficiency were in a continuous trade off, and this affected administrative structure and process. Thus, the role of the Transport Board in planning was inadequate because Secretaries of State for War did not consult it before major Cabinet decisions were taken. Nevertheless, once preparations were in progress, there were frequent meetings, and Castlereagh clearly understood the difficulties inherent in the transport procurement process. The Transport Board did better than it had done before 1794 when Pitt made it effectively independent of either the army or the navy. There was no repetition of the situation at the beginning of the War of American Independence (1775-83) when the different departments were bidding against each other for hire of the transports.¹⁹ The impact of the weather and the inability of all the departments involved to perform in harmony during the preparation phase were often underestimated. The lack of information on future requirements was an issue, but the Board skilfully used the price mechanism to attract ships, while refusing to pay an overly-high rate. The Board came to have a reputation for efficiency and were given other tasks because of this, such as the administration of the Sick and Hurt Board. The transport agents on station incurred criticism, but there was often a failure to appreciate the difficulties they faced.²⁰

These difficulties were eased when distance was lessened. Thus, success in northern Spain in 1813 enabled the British to use the harbours there, and thereby to shorten the lines of communication that had hitherto been via Lisbon, although there were problems in developing an effective supply system. Distance was always easier to overcome when able to operate with na-

18 KNIGHT, *Britain*, pp. 427-9.

19 KNIGHT, *Britain*, pp. 109-70.

20 Robert SUTCLIFFE, *British Expeditionary Warfare and the Defeat of Napoleon, 1793-1815* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016).

val support. On expeditions, troops carried their supplies with them in store ships which provided mobility, as with the supplies for 40,000 men for eight months carried by the fleet taking a large expedition to the West Indies in 1795,²¹ although the ships did not carry the wagons and draught animals that helped mobility on land. Wellington repeatedly urged other commanders in Iberia that:

‘I recommend to your attention my first campaign in Portugal. I kept the sea always on my flank; the transports attended the movements of the army as a magazine; and I had at all times, and every day, a short and easy communication with them. The army, therefore, could never be distressed for provisions and stores, however limited its means of land transport; and in case of necessity it might have embarked at any point of the coast.’²²

In 1813, Wellington added, ‘If anyone wishes to know the history of this war, I will tell them that it is our maritime superiority gives me the power of maintaining my army while the army is unable to do so.’²³

The contrast with the French was instructive. When the Royal Navy cut off sea supplies to Barcelona in 1810, the French sent a convoy of over 1000 wagons overland and its passage required three divisions for its protection. The next required five and hamstrung all French offensive operations in Catalonia.²⁴

The operational side of logistics attracts most attention, but the strategic dimension was the most significant. The British were unique both because they had cash and because their operations required naval support. These provided two very different strategic parameters. If these parameters might seem a long way from commissariat wagoners urging unwilling oxen forward, there was in practice an important linkage.

21 M. DUFFY, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War Against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 190-1.

22 John GURWOOD (ed.), *The Dispatches of Field Marshal, the Duke of Wellington* (12 vols, London, 1837-8), IX, 363, X, 162, 479-80.

23 R.W. HAMILTON (eds.), *Letters and Papers of Sir Thomas Byam Martin* (London, 1898), II, 409.

24 M. DUFFY, ‘Festering the Spanish ulcer. The Royal Navy and the Peninsular War, 1808-1814,’ in B.A. ELLEMAN and S.C.M. PAINE (eds), *Naval Power and Expeditionary Warfare* (Abingdon, 2011), p. 21 and p. 28 note 13.

This was important to the need to respond in theatre. The difficulties facing the Commissary General were accentuated by the lack of a collective experience. The British army had encountered major logistical difficulties in Iberia in 1703-13 and 1762,²⁵ but, by 1808, when new forces were sent, there was no relevant experience. Instead, that of operating in the Low Countries in 1793-6 and 1799 was very different. In part, Iberia posed issues of limited supplies, harsh environment, and poor road system, that were very different to those in the Low Countries, as with the complaints of Lieutenant-Colonel Guard, who was in command of Almeida in Portugal in 1808-9.²⁶ Nevertheless, in part, whatever the area, relations with allies were a similar problem. Issues faced were also seen in operations in British territories, notably North America in 1754-60, 1775-83, and 1812-15, and Ireland in 1798. In Iberia, however, language proved an additional burden, while the poverty of the region posed a more acute pressure on food supplies. A key aspect of poverty was the weakness of the communications network.

There was not, however, the issue of operating in hostile territory, until Wellington moved into France, and, even then, there was concern not to offend local sensitivities, for the British were the allies of the Bourbon cause, committed to a Bourbon restoration, and reliant on local acceptance to move from military output, in the shape of victory, to political outcome in the shape of compliance.

This situation was linked to politics of logistics in the shape of not angering local opinion. In contrast, French requisitioning, which so often meant looting, compromised support for client regimes, notably that of Joseph I in Spain, and thus posed an additional military burden in the shape of the counter-insurgency overlap of obtaining supplies. Spanish guerrilla and regular operations hit French logistics. The British were harsh in their treatment of looters. There was summary hanging and flogging, both carried out in front of the unit in question in order to drive home the point. This exemplary punish-

25 Re 1762, San Marino California, Huntington Library, Loudoun papers, nos. 10125, 8607, 8604, 8608; James, Lord Tyrawly, British commander, to Marquis of Pombal, Portuguese First Minister, 24 July 1762, Belfast, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, T 2812/8/48.

26 Memorandum of 17 Dec. 1808, Exeter, County Record Office, Guard's letterbook, 49/33 fol. 10.

ment was an aspect of the disciplinary system.

In part, this discipline addressed both the politics of the situation and the nature of recruitment, but it was also a response to the more particular problem posed by the juxtaposition of supply shortages at the point of operations, where troop demands were highest, with the resource-funded availability of plentiful supplies at the depots accessible to British seaborne supplies, notably Lisbon and Oporto. This was a consequence of transport problems, notably the difficulties of supply columns arriving on schedule. These difficulties were accentuated when units advanced unexpectedly, whether in direction or in speed or in both, as in 1811.

Yet, the British proved better able to do so than the Americans did when advancing into Canada in the War of 1812. At the same time, logistical issues posed problems and could lead to pressure to engage or prevent moving forward.²⁷

Conveying instructions to non-nationals in these circumstances exacerbated the difficulties, not least strain on the commissaries. This situation was made more difficult by the extent to which the British did not generally advance near coastlines and usually could not rely on riverine transport. Paperwork exacerbated the strain on the commissariat, though leaving the historian with plentiful records. This paperwork was particularly apparent in the case of operations within Europe, and less so for those in India.

Logistics can be too readily separated for analytical purposes. In reality, it was part of a supply bundle that crucially included recruitment and maintenance, the latter encompassing care for men and horses as well as equipment. In practical terms, logistics was not really separated out, and this was even more the case given the coalition dimension of British operations and its generally external location. It is easy to emphasise the disadvantages of the British army's logistical 'system' in comparison with its advantages; but, in practice, the latter were considerable.

The strength of British logistical capability would have mattered little if it had not brought success. So also for the 40,000 round-shot and shell used

27 J. BLACK, *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon* (Norman, Ok., 2009), pp. 96, 162.

in the bombardment of Algiers in 1816.²⁸ French victory in 1805, or German in 1940 might have encouraged a different view; and this is not an idle counterfactual. Yet, it is the ability of Britain to sustain struggle even when faced with a number of enemies, as in 1762, 1778-83, 1796-1802, and 1803-14 that is striking. That speaks to the ability of an *ancien régime* society, one that had ‘modernised,’ notably in the 1690s, and again in 1797-1801, to draw on strengths, political, economic, cultural and institutional, that its predatory opponents lacked. The same was to happen again in World War Two.



28 C. N. PARKINSON, *Edward Pellew, Viscount Exmouth, Admiral of the Red* (London, 1934), pp. 419-72.



7

Airpower and Warfare, 1950–Present

Success, Failures, and Enduring Challenges¹

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the honor of this invitation. I'd first like to say to the cadets, congratulations: you've chosen a career that is well worth following. You've chosen a career in which your potential can be developed, and you've chosen a career which is important to your country and the world. Somebody not much older than you, in January 1904, was sitting listening to a seminar in London. It was a cold afternoon, and the seminar was being given by the leading geopolitician of the age, a man called Halford Mackinder. And Mackinder was arguing that with transcontinental railways—the Russians were just finishing their transcontinental railway to the Pacific—the nature of military power had totally changed. That armies would be able to move rapidly across continental landmasses, and that armies would therefore be more influential than navies. Leo Amery, the young man sitting there—and we're talking about January 1904—turned to Mackinder at the end and said, "Well what about aircraft?" He'd read about two men trying out an aircraft on a beach in North Carolina. At that time that seemed a remarkable suggestion. Amery argued that with aircraft, the nature of power was already changing, that the world would not, and no longer be dominated by whoever could move troops most rapidly across continental land masses.

Now initially, Amery's observation did not seem well proven. If you go through the 1900s or early nineteen-teens, you could see that aircraft were relatively primitive, very simple, extraordinarily vulnerable; the pilots, ob-

1 Harmon Memorial Lecture No. 59, 2016. Originally published in *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History 1988-2017*, A Collection of the Second Thirty (31–60) Harmon Lectures Given at the United States Air Force Academy edited by Lt Col. Mark E. Grotelueschen, Air University Press, Muir S. Fairchild Research Information Center, Maxwell AFB, April 2020, pp. 259-269.

viously, were extraordinarily vulnerable as well. And in the First World War, although aircraft were important, they were essentially ancillary to the armies. The majority of aircraft in World War I, in fact, were used for reconnaissance—very important, to be able to see over the battlefield, to see where your opponent’s front lines were—but essentially a supporting tool to the army.

But after that, the situation started to change. And in the 1920s and 1930s, at a relatively rapid rate, the potential of aircraft to change the existing relationships of space and time, to move more rapidly than any other way possible across large bodies of space, and to do so much more speedily than had seemed even possible to imagine 20 years earlier, was already being realized. By the 1930s, there were long-distance air links for domestic passengers and mail. You could go, for example, from London to Adelaide or London to Hong Kong. You had to stop several times, but at least the capacity was being created to reimagine the world from the perspective of airpower. And airpower theorists were persuading governments to experiment at a time when governments were short of money. The Great Depression of the 1930s meant there really wasn’t much money, but they were persuading governments that airpower offered a way to leap over the existing limitations in weapons systems.

What had followed World War I and the incredibly high casualties of trench warfare would be a determination of “never again.” Never again to fight in that fashion and the determination and the search for a magic bullet that would enable people to circumvent that. Now as we know, all magic bullets have their limitations. The history of war is littered with people imagining that they can completely transform weaponry and completely transform the situation. But nevertheless, even if you are aware of the limitations, it is still what you can do with new weapons systems that is impressive. Gunpowder might not have produced always the impact that people anticipated, but gunpowder did transform war. The steam engine, whether the steam engine in warships or the steam engine in locomotives to move troops around, might, again, not have had completely the impact envisaged, but nevertheless, it again transformed war. You just imagine what the American Civil War would have been like without locomotives, for example. And so, also with airpower.

The ideas developed in the 1930s focused on the possibility of using bombers in order to circumvent—to literally overfly—front lines and to weaken the

industrial potential of other societies and to persuade their civilians to stop fighting. The usual line, as you may be aware, is to be skeptical about the effectiveness of bombing, but I have to tell you that in the aftermath of what happened as a result of dropping just two bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, it's a little difficult to understand why people felt that bombing had obviously the limitations that people always say that it seems to have.

As far as naval warfare was concerned, in World War II, we must remember if we are interested in airpower, airpower is not only a matter of what airpower can achieve on land. What airpower can achieve at sea is also important. It's not as though aircraft suddenly lose their potential when they cross the coastline. Airpower at sea was very, very influential in World War II. In the Pacific, aircraft carriers played an absolutely crucial role in speeding the advance of American forces. Aircraft were incredibly important in defeating German submarines in the Battle of the Atlantic. And in more conventional bombing and fighter campaigns in the war against both Germany and Japan, aircraft repeatedly were able to help deliver tactical, operational, and strategic results. So it wasn't surprising that in the period I have to talk about, which is the period after 1950, it wasn't surprising that people imagined that aircraft would dominate the military environment. And indeed it's worth bearing in mind that Air Force commanders in the 1950s and 1960s were commanders who had served in World War II, and they took forward their reading of World War II into what appeared to be the possible breakout of World War III.

Now if you look at the situation, you can draw attention to both the strengths and the drawbacks of airpower. You will be aware that people often focus on those drawbacks. They talk about, for example, that Vietnam became the most-bombed country in the history of the world without the people doing the bombing achieving their results. They would draw attention to the way in which airpower may actually be lethal and destructive, but that doesn't necessarily affect what goes on—on the ground. And we can note those points, and those points are valid. It is pertinent to note that there are limitations. But much of the limitation of airpower during the Cold War reflected the fact that the Cold War was being fought as a limited war. And if you fight as a limited war, there are always limits to what you can achieve.

If you actually take the situation from, shall we say, 1945 to 1970 as our

first unit, you will be aware that it was the United States that did most of the work (with the British following suit). It's precisely because the United States developed an aerial-borne nuclear deterrent that the West—NATO as it was formed in 1949—had some counter to the fact that the Soviet Union absolutely outnumbered what the Western forces had on land.

The Soviet army had shown its astonishing potency in 1943, 1944, and 1945. Soviet forces had advanced from the river Volga to the river Elbe, an advance greater than any other advance in European history. Soviet forces had smashed the Japanese army in Manchuria. The communists themselves, Chinese but with Soviet assistance, had then gone on to win in the Chinese Civil War. It was not surprising that Western policy makers and Western strategists—aware that their public did not want high rates of conscription, or necessarily any conscription, and aware that they didn't want to actually live on a permanent war footing—sought to use aerial deterrence in order to make sure that the Soviet Union did not mount another attack. Now, as I've said, limited warfare has its limitations. Having this potential didn't mean that one uses it. In fact, usually having weapons of great lethality, it's often sensible not to use them, because they tend to be wasting an asset. And you might say that America had this cutting-edge technology, the first with the atom bomb but nevertheless losing the Chinese Civil War, the first with the hydrogen bomb, but nevertheless not being able to use it before the Soviets came.

But that wasn't the point. What they were trying to do was to stage deterrence without war, and aircraft proved tremendously important to that. It gave a range to American power that could not be matched by land forces. But that, of course, was not the limit of American military capability at all. Although it is true that the so-called bomber barons, the Strategic Air Command, dominated a lot of American thinking in the 1950s and 1960s, it was nevertheless also the case that there was a realization that other branches of airpower had to be kept fit for purpose. Part of that was naval, and indeed aircraft carriers really come into their own in the 1950s. They become capable of operating at night, they develop trip wires², they develop better systems of launching planes, and aircraft carriers show much more potential. Indeed, by 1955, American aircraft carriers were carrying planes that could drop nuclear

2 Arresting gear.

bombs. They're actually able to be part of the deterrence.

But the Air Force itself also had part of a major attempt to mount and increase its effectiveness in a field which it had allowed to, as it were, run down. And that was tactical aircraft. And the Vietnam War proved a key lesson there. Now when we look at the Vietnam War, we usually look at the limitations of airpower³. We usually look at the fact that the North fought on. That is indeed true. But if you're looking at the war in the South, what is very instructive is what airpower allowed the Americans to do and the contrast between what the Americans could do in the South, when fighting the communists, and what the French had been unable to do in Vietnam in the late forties, early fifties when they, unsuccessfully, were fighting the communists. Essentially airpower provides one with a substitute for artillery. It is more flexible in that account. Airpower also, both helicopters and transport aircraft, enables you to supply isolated fortress positions without having to rely on convoys that could be ambushed on the ground. And ultimately after the Vietcong was essentially wiped out in 1968, and after that the war was largely the North Vietnamese units, the North Vietnamese, when they staged their conventional offensive, the Spring Offensive in 1972, and used large quantities of tanks, and advanced from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, it was aircraft that played the key role in stopping the Spring Offensive.

So by the early seventies, it was clear that whatever the effectiveness of strategic bombing as a deterrent, it was also necessary and possible to use tactical aircraft to achieve immediate effects on ground operations. That had also been demonstrated very clearly in the sixties and almost more dramatically with the astonishing success of the Israeli Air Force in the Six-Day War in destroying the military potential of both Egypt and Syria. Now what the Israeli Air Force did, of course, was show the double nature of airpower in this respect.

In order to attack the Egyptian and Syrian forces on the ground, the Israelis first had to gain air dominance. And air dominance meant wiping out the opposing air forces. That was a lesson that was very much driven home in one morning. We're not talking about attrition. In one morning, the Egyptian

3 As a case in point, consider Mark Clodfelter's *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

Air Force—which was a very large air force, largely equipped with Soviet planes—was destroyed, and after that the Israeli Air Force could turn to tank busting, which they were good at. And, of course, the point about tank busting by air is tank busting by air is something you can do a long way in advance of wherever your tanks or your own antitank guns could get. The American Air Force, and indeed other air forces, looked carefully at what the Israelis had done. The lesson running forward from that was that tactical airpower was still crucially important, but it rested its effectiveness on an ability to gain total air superiority.

The next big war between Israel and its neighbors sent a warning. In the next big war, the so called Yom Kippur War of 1973, when the Egyptians and the Syrians launched surprise attacks, the Egyptians tried, with new Soviet-provided equipment—in fact both the Soviets and the Americans were trying out their equipment through their allies—the Egyptians tried very much to level the playing field by using shoulder-mounted surface-to-air missiles (SAM). And these SAMs, in fact, proved pretty deadly. Israeli planes flying low, in order to attack Egyptian tanks, could be taken out of the sky at minimum cost with a SAM. And what that then did was in a sense launch an arms race in the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s, as the respective powers sought to work out how to make their aircraft successful against SAMs.

In the end of course, as you're probably aware, the Israelis developed, with American assistance, methods of jamming the Soviet SAMs. Those methods were subsequently used in the Gulf War against other branches of Soviet equipment that had been supplied, in this case to the Iraqis. But what the point of that campaigning showed is that the very necessity for a quick victory meant that you had to rely heavily on airpower. These were wars that were literally over in a matter of days—the one in the sixties, as I've said, was six days, and the Yom Kippur War, at least the key fighting in the Yom Kippur War, was over in two days. The war went on a little longer, but the key fighting was over in two days, and you cannot achieve results in just two days if you rely simply on moving forces by land or sea.

The Yom Kippur War also showed another very major potential of airpower. As I've mentioned, on the first day of the war, the Israelis took heavy casualties; they lost about a fifth of their air force. And they took very heavy

casualties and some of the rest of it was in a bit of a mess, and the American government decided that they would rearm Israel, and they decided to fly new planes straight to Israel inside big transport aircraft. That again was an aspect of the capacity of airpower in that period. Another aspect of that capacity, very differently, had been shown a few years earlier when the Soviet Union had pretty much done the same thing in reverse in using its massive planes, its Antonov planes, very large planes, which could carry tanks, in order to intervene against the Czechoslovak government and stage a coup in Czechoslovakia and actually fly into Prague airport with these enormous planes, disgorging tanks. So the capacity of airpower to provide a logistical lift, which was simply far more rapid than any such capacity was possible by sea, let alone land, very much was a qualification of Mackinder's arguments about the true technologies dominating war.

Now I've taken us up to the 1970s. In the 1970s, it briefly looked as though the Cold War was going to all be over. There was an attempt to settle it by a process of diplomacy known as *détente*, and during that period in the late 1970s, airpower was not at the center of military thought, nor was anything very much. The States were recovering from the economic depression that had been linked to the oil crisis following the Yom Kippur War, governments were poor, and they were not investing heavily in new equipment.⁴ But *détente* broke down, and in the early 1980s the Cold War resumed with great intensity. The West became very fearful that the Soviet Union was going to mount an attack on it and, in particular, that the Soviets would use their still crushing, overwhelming superiority in ground forces, particularly tanks, in order to stage an invasion of Western Europe. We now know from material that's been accessed from the Eastern Bloc since the fall of communism that the Soviets did indeed plan to do so as late as 1983.

The West became interested—Western military planners became very interested—in the idea of trying to win a subnuclear war. There was always the understanding—the original understanding had been—if the Soviets attacked, the West would go nuclear at once. That had been the basis of 1950s and 1960s

4 This is a reference to the economic difficulties experienced in the United States, and elsewhere, from about 1973 to 1975, when real GDP was falling and inflation and unemployment were rising.

defense planning, and that was the logic of having aircraft permanently ready with atom bombs in order to attack the Soviet Union. Well, that remained an interest in the eighties, but on top of that, Western military planners looked at how best to try and engage Soviet forces in a war that might be begun with neither side initially using nuclear weapons. To try and keep it below that level. The West decided to focus its military planning in the 1980s on what it called “maneuverist warfare.”⁵ In other words, instead of having straight lines of defenses, which they would try and hold against Soviets attacks, they would rely on mobile forces in defense. And in that planning, a central role was given to airpower, because of course, the ultimate maneuverist weapon is an aircraft. There was maneuverist warfare intended on land, but as you will appreciate, units on land can only move so fast with their firepower at any period of time. So in practical terms, ideas of airpower effectiveness and the application of using airpower against, in particular, Soviet tank advances developed very much in Western thinking in the 1980s, particularly American thinking, though the Brits were also following along as per usual.

It was those ideas that were to be applied against Iraq in 1991 in the First Gulf War, the Gulf War that broke out as a result of Iraq’s invasion and conquest of Kuwait the previous year. In effect, the real battle of the Cold War, other than the ones between the Israelis and their opponents, was actually the use of the Cold War technology, the use of Cold War weaponry, was actually the one seen in 1991, and this involved a very heavy usage of airpower. Airpower was necessary in order to drive away the Iraqi Air Force. Airpower was necessary in order to suppress Iraqi air defenses. As a result of both of those, the allied forces had complete air superiority over the battlespace, and on top of that they had the capacity to attack Iraqi mobile missiles, the Scuds⁶. And then of course, airpower was used with deadly effectiveness in advance of, and in support of, allied advances, particularly allied tank advances. Again, as had been demonstrated by the Israelis, but now on a much greater scale, the

5 For a succinct discussion on this idea, see Harold Winton, “An Ambivalent Partnership: U.S. Army and Air Force Perspectives on Air-Ground Operations, 1973–90” in *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, ed. Phillip S. Meilinger (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1997), 399–441.

6 The name given to a series of tactical ballistic missiles produced in the Soviet Union and widely exported during the Cold War.

capacity of aircraft to act as tank killers was very brutally and clearly shown.

In the rest of the 1990s, the principal conflicts in which airpower played a major role were the NATO interventions against Serbia in the Bosnia crisis, which culminated in 1995, and the Kosovo crisis in 1999. The terrain there was far harder than the terrain in the deserts of the Middle East. In Kosovo, for example, there are steeply wooded valleys in which it is very difficult to identify targets and acquire them in time to hit them. And on top of that, there were high levels of political concern about engaging with targets that might involve civilian casualties or that might be perceived as sending a message which somebody else wouldn't like. On the other hand, the very ability for the allies to decide what they chose to attack and what they chose not to attack, which bridge to blow up and which bridge not to blow up, which power station to destroy and which power station not to destroy, was in fact a very abrupt and complete demonstration of airpower. Airpower is a matter like any other military system of potential. You don't always use it. As you may have noticed the atom bomb hasn't been used since 1945. You may not always use your range of weaponry; you might not always use your intensity of attack—increasingly these days in the world people try to fight limited wars—but the very potential to make the choice is a product of a capability that enables you to deny your opponent the luxury of being certain what the limits of the actions you are likely to take will be. And that proved to be a crucial factor of airpower. It enabled, as it were, the prospect of choice, one which the allies existed and controlled and which they did not need to fear from their opponents.

The 2000s, of course, have seen two less-successful interventions—both in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Less successful despite it having proved possible to deploy troops, to support troops, and to achieve important objectives. After all, Saddam Hussein is not exactly running the government of Iraq at the moment, nor are the Taliban in charge in Kabul at the moment. So there have been many successes, but what is not proved so successful is ending the war in the sense of forcing one's will on one's opponent. That is true; that is a limitation.

But that is not so much a limitation specifically of airpower. That in fact is a limitation caused by, in many senses, rather poorly conceived strategies and

also engaging with the societies where it is very difficult to get people to stop fighting and to press the switches of forcing them to pay attention to what one wants to do. In other words, to move from military profile, military potential, and lethality to actually achieving a set of political results. That of course is not new. That is in no way new. That is a classic product of any weapon system and will go on being a product of weapons systems, however they are determined. Because as you are well aware, war is a matter not so much of killing your opponent or capturing territory; war is a matter of forcing your will on your opponent. Of making them accept your point of view in a coercive fashion. Now doing so cannot always be achieved. It will not always be possible to achieve the outcome one wants politically. But obviously, the ability to try and do so is crucial to the maintenance of national security and the furtherance of national interests. And in doing so, one wants to do it with the minimum of costs to one's own country in people and with the maximum of possible disruption to one's opponent or potential opponent.

And as I mentioned right at the outset, the ability because of equations of time and space to do that with airpower have risen dramatically. That, in a sense, if anything, has become more important to the United States at the present moment, because the United States is moving from the dominant position which it had in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. It's moving to a more complex world, where there are other powers, principally China, but also to a certain extent Russia, which may not be as powerful but which are clearly able to follow policies that defy the wishes of the United States. So to a certain extent we're moving from a unipolar world to a multipolar world⁷. In that context, it is very important to have weapon systems that convey a threat without necessarily having to be used. That balance is a very, very significant one. It's also important in a world where confrontation is an issue. Whether that confrontation is, as it increasingly is at the moment, in the East or South China Sea, or whether it may follow more frequently on the borderlands of Russia, we don't know.

But the great advantage of airpower is it enables one to stage one's own

7 Most historians would describe the Cold War period as a bipolar world, with the rise of an American-dominated unipolar world that emerged upon the end of the Cold War around 1989–1991.

half of the confrontational equation. People obviously don't want war, but they want to be able to threaten war, to stage one's own half of the confrontational equation much more readily and rapidly than if one was reliant simply on other means—and also much more readily and rapidly than if there was a threat that one's opponent could gain control of the airspace and therefore deny it to one's own power and one's own allies. And from that point of view, as long as the United States believes that it is necessary, as it surely is, for its security and interests to be able at least to confront foes and to make foes aware that there may well be risks in mounting assaults, then clearly one needs airpower. For one obvious instance of this in the modern world, nobody knows quite what to do about the North Koreans. And it may well be that their boasts become slightly foolish. It's going to be a while before their missiles can reach the main continental United States as they're threatening. But to the best of my knowledge, Hawaii is still a state in the union, and Honolulu is, I think, America's tenth most-populous city. And the capacity of the North Koreans to fire their missiles further and further in the Pacific should be, as it indeed is, troubling for American military planners.

And yet again, it is the capacity at least to be able to deploy power rapidly to the area, what one does with it is far less clear at the present moment, but it's the ability to deploy power that at least offers one the potential for deterrence. Now looking ahead is always difficult. My own personal view, and I was discussing it with colleagues here today, is that it is important because we don't have the data set for the future. We need to think about history when we're looking ahead. And the historical point I would make is a simple one. If you turn back over the last 50 to 60 years, you will see marked discontinuities in world politics, in great-power confrontations, in technological development. We're a world away now from the metal-bashing industries being dominant as they were in the sixties and seventies, and will obviously also see major developments in military doctrine, strategy, and technology. The wars that you as cadets will be going into, the one thing you should know if you have any sense of history, is that the past shows us that change is not linear. What happens tomorrow has not necessarily anything much to do with what happened yesterday. Change occurs in a discontinuous fashion. And because of that, it is crucially important that your country invests in your talents, your talents being not simply those of your ability to use existing weapons systems,

important as that is, but your ultimate talent is your ability to think flexibly about the world in which you live, and about what force can achieve within it, and about what is necessary to do to pursue the interests and security of your nation through the means of military confrontation and, if necessary, war. In doing so you will face a rapidly changing environment.

But I think that the equation change that we saw, through airpower to time and space, the ability to, as it were, have troops take off from North Carolina and to be able to parachute into Central Asia not all that many hours later. The ability to get into a troop transporter in west Russia, near Belarus, and actually then land supplies in, for example, West Africa. The ability to actually overfly a great distance, potential trouble areas, and to provide at least a degree of intimidation and to remind those there that you are a presence. All of those are factors and features which are likely to continue. The weapon you are using will probably change, almost certainly will change. Your opponent may well change. But what will go on being the case is, unless you believe that there is some utopian future in which human beings totally change the nature and, as it were, never have acrimonious thoughts towards each other—and I have to tell you I think that would be highly implausible—unless you believe that, it is necessary for any government to be able, ultimately, to protect its own citizenry and to do that through relying on a trained and professional military. That is your task, it is an important task, and I'm confident you can do it well.



8

War and Cartography

by Jeremy Martin Black

War inherently takes place in a spatial context. It is an activity that can only be conducted in that fashion. As a result, mental mapping is central to conflict, and at every level, from the tactical to the strategic. Combatants order themselves in space and have to maintain that sense whatever the strains of combat. Doing so orientates them in terms of goal, means, and both colleagues and opponents. This sense of space is important to point-of-contact engagement however contested: whether hand-to-hand or by missiles weapons at any range.

For most combat, we have no maps. Instead, mental mapping was the key, as, indeed, overwhelmingly remains the case today. That point is not one found in discussion of the subject, but any emphasis on mental mapping leads to the conclusion that the standard approach to war and cartography is teleological, in that it adopts a progressivist account, one predicated on the assumption that mapping war is the desirable outcome and a necessary means. Instead, the suggestion here is that a needs-based assessment is appropriate, one that considers idea of fitness for purpose in terms both of the maps and of their usage.

Such an approach, moreover, valuably complements that of considering the survival of artefacts, not least by asking what purpose is served. For maps in this context, there is the question not only of why they were retained, but, in particular, their potential value on a recurrent and/or long-term basis. That adds a further dimension to fitness for purpose.

So also with the issue of accuracy. That is not a fixed quantity but again a relative one in which fitness is dependent on the need for mapping as well as the opportunities that exist. Such an approach provides the theoretical background to a consideration of the specifics of the subject.

First, and most obviously, not all places were equal in coverage and significance. Indeed, that is a major difference between the mapping of the world,

in whole or part, and the use of such maps for war, and, in contrast, more specific and detailed mapping for particular military purposes. The latter further demonstrates the point that is integrated to mapping about places not being equal, both in terms of which places are mapped and to what detail.

Linked to that issue comes that of purpose and timing, in particular maps produced prior to the period of immediate need and those arising from the latter. Indeed, in the second case, there is a collapsing of the distinction between map and photograph, with the photograph now serving as a form of map, and for immediate tactical purposes. This point underlines the difficulty of defining a map, but also, as a related point, the question of means versus ends in mapping. Thus, the trench maps of World War One were based on photographs.

Returning to the point that not all places are equal, it was especially the case that sites to be fortified attracted mapping attention, and, more particularly, in order to plan how best to defend them. In this case, there was again an overlap with other forms of illustration, notably in the shape of diagrams and pictures. That contrast, however, was not as clear as might be presumed, as maps included pictograms as devices. Moreover, some maps were simultaneously diagrammatic and pictorial. This, indeed, is an element that remained significant into the twentieth century.

The importance of maps for fortification was to be enhanced in the twentieth century as fortification spread into comprehensive front-wide systems with World War One. In that conflict, trench warfare, to a degree, swallowed the strategic and operational dimensions of war in tactical problems, but that process also encouraged the mapping of the systems.

In World War Two, the fighting was less static, but location remained a key issue, not least due to the continual importance of artillery. Indeed, that was a powerful driver for mapping at the tactical level. The understanding of ballistics demanded a fixing of target location in order that the algorithms that determined aiming could apply.

This account of mapping provides a clear linkage with capability, and the related requirement for maps for bombing was in effect another form of ballistics. The precise location of the target, and an understanding of the routes there, were both crucial. That meant that mapping for air warfare remained

in effect two-dimensional, rather than focusing on the three dimensions that aerial conflict required. Instead, the latter for long remained a matter of the visual identification of targets. That changed greatly, however, when radar became more significant, not least because it allowed effective night-fighting.

Visibility was very differently a factor in submarine and anti-submarine warfare, but both affected the parameters of conflict at sea. So also did the deployment of aircraft. To focus hereafter in this account on the example of World War Two, mapping for the tactical level of warfare, as well as the operational level, but even more so, depended on the use (and updating) of existing map information and also, conversely, on the creation of totally new material. The range of the existing information varied greatly across the world. This was on an established pattern. Thus, there were no effective maps of Libya prior to the Italian conquest, but it was then rapidly mapped by the Istituto Geografico Militare of the army. So also for Ethiopia after its conquest in 1936.

The Pacific War posed major issues. Facing, from the unexpected Japanese attack in December 1941, the need to operate in the poorly-mapped Pacific, much of which had been in British or Japanese hands prior to the conflict, the Americans made extensive use of photo-reconnaissance, not least for mapping invasion beaches. The American landing force on the Japanese-occupied island of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands in the south-western Pacific in 1942 lacked adequate maps, including landing maps, a problem that indicated the need for special amphibious landing maps. Moreover, the American naval raid in October 1943 on Wake Island, which before the war had been an American possession, faced the problem of inadequate charts for the surrounding waters. So also for the Australians with northern Australia, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.

In contrast, the Philippines, an American colony prior to the war, had been surveyed by the Coast and Geodetic Survey, a civilian agency under the Department of Commerce, and their data and charts were used for the successful American invasion of the Philippines in 1944-5. The Australian Navy Hydrographic Service, surveyed New Guinea from the summer of 1942, pressing on to produce surveys for elsewhere in the South Pacific, in part using material from the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey mapping, notably of

the Philippines. More generally, there was a widespread use of fathometers for inshore navigation.

In the final year of the war, the U.S. Naval Hydrographic Office printed more than forty million charts. Some survey ships were equipped with presses that could print 2,000 sheets an hour. This was an aspect of the cumulative experience and capability that were important to American operations. That the Americans could plan where they wanted to operate and where to mount an invasion, increased the demand for maps, as did the inherently fluid style of their operations.

The British also markedly stepped up the production of hydrographic charts, notably in support of the 1944 invasion of Normandy. The danger of German bombing, abundantly seen with the bombing of the Ordnance Survey in Southampton, had led to the Hydrographic Office being moved from London to more distant Bath in 1939, and then to new buildings in distant Taunton in 1941. The supply of, and need for, charts was more problematic for Britain than in World War One due to the greater range and speed of operations, and the resulting number of tactical possibilities. This situation led to increased demand, which, in part, was met by the use of rotary offset printing machines. In the final run-up to the invasion of Normandy in 1944, the Hydrographic Office provided documents to thousands of vessels.

In the Soviet Union, there was a particular need for marine navigation-artillery charts for the Baltic and Black Seas which were designed to help warships bombard targets inland in support of ground forces. Detailed inland information and a kilometre grid were supplied accordingly. This task very much matched the general doctrines and practice for the use of Soviet warships.

There were also new technological requirements. Radar was a reflection of the novel nature of the three-dimensional character of mapping that stemmed from the role of submarines at sea and from the addition of aircraft to the vertical space already represented by terrain. The likely significance of air power and submarine attacks made this a major factor as a defensive capability. As with the use of mapping for artillery, radar was a response to the need to fix position accurately. However, unlike artillery, which generally fired from a stationary position, aircraft and submarines posed an inherently dynam-

ic character in location and, thus, the depiction of location. Radar, thereby, looked ahead to what was to become a key element in the depiction of the battle-space, that of the GPS (Global Positioning System). At the same time, in using radar, it was necessary to develop systems and practices for signal processing, for example to distinguish aircraft from atmospheric features.

Radio navigation systems, such as the German *knickebein* system, were developed for aircraft. With OBOE, a targeting system first used in December 1941, and Gee-H, a radio navigation device introduced in 1942, the British developed accurate radio navigation systems which ensured that weather, darkness, and smog were less of an obstacle to bombing. Separately, Allied operations against submarines benefited greatly at the tactical level from sonar. This complemented the use of signals interception to fix the general area of submarine presence.

Maps were more extensively used for ground operations than in World War One. In part, this was because of the greater mobility of units and movement of operations, not least on the Western and Eastern Fronts in Europe, but also in the Mediterranean, for example in the war in Italy in 1943-5. The comparison between the movement in the war there in 1915-18 and that in 1943-5 is instructive. At the same time, a more mobile war did not prevent static operations akin to trench warfare.

Terrain evaluation maps were important for both infantry and for vehicles operating off-road, both military and logistical. Such maps were major additions to topographical maps. German terrain evaluation maps were impressive and effective. They covered a range of needs, both offensive and defensive, and regions, including the Libyan Sahara, and appeared at a number of scales. Colour was a key aspect in helping make the maps readily accessible. Aerial photography was important, but alongside ground information such as bridge weight limits. The material offered in German terrain evaluation maps included not just ground suitability, but also forest composition (type of tree) and density, slope gradients unsuitable for armoured vehicles, and important viewpoints with their field of view. In addition, German officers and NCOs were taught map drawing, and at a good level.

The British established the Inter-Service Topographical Division in the autumn of 1940, and it carried out terrain analysis to supplement topographical

maps. This led to the printing of information on maps in order to make them more useful for troop movements, for example with the notation 'Irrigation ditches.' Tactical needs led the British to develop what were termed Goings maps, which were designed to display the nature of the terrain. Goings maps used colour to provide readily-grasped analysis. In addition to the terrain, metalled roads were presented differently depending on their width.

The Americans created the Military Geology Unit in June 1942, and it produced material for operations, notably Operation Husky, the successful invasion of Sicily in 1943. The value of this material in turn led to an increase in the unit's work, and its geographical expansion also to cover Pacific operations. American terrain appreciation maps covered a range of topics including not only the impact of the terrain on troop and vehicle maps, but also additional material on slope, soil, vegetation, climate and geological features. 'Trafficability,' the suitability of the terrain for cross-country movement, was the key element, and the Americans became adept at producing such material rapidly, as in January 1945 in preparation for the successful invasion of Germany. The material was made more valuable by being accompanied by charts showing, per month, the expected number of days of 'trafficable ground.'

Reliable maps and mapping still encouraged planning to reach a specific point on a map at a certain time, planning already seen in World War One; but that crucial planning goal was now linked to greater mobility. In addition, the use of maps within the military was more widely extended. Whereas ordinary soldiers (unlike officers and senior non-commissioned officers) did not use maps extensively during World War One, they did so in World War Two and developed spatial awareness accordingly.

Mobility carried with it the risk of being obliged to defend areas of interest against attack to a greater depth than in the previous war. This factor interacted with the extension of the war due to the Allies fighting Italy from June 1940 and Japan from December 1941. Thus, in 1940, the British mapped the border areas of Kenya in preparation for campaigning against Italian East Africa (Ethiopia and Somalia). The threat of a Japanese invasion of Australia in early 1942 led to the production of large-scale maps for coastal areas of Australia, notably of Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, and near the cities of Adelaide, Darwin and Perth. These maps were linked to the loca-

tion of artillery, for example to protect the naval base of Freemantle and the sea approaches to Melbourne.

A key element in mapping indeed was provided by the need to locate fortifications and to do so for strategic and operational ends and as part of integrated defence systems. Fortifications had to be planned with reference to each other and to possible attack routes, and they had to be fitted into the terrain. The war is not generally considered in terms of fortifications, in part because the emphasis is on mobility and notably, for ground combat, on tanks. This however, can lead to a serious failure to appreciate their significance.

The role of fortified positions in the war helped ensure that there were parallels with the mapping of opposing positions in the trench warfare of World War One. Aerial reconnaissance again proved significant, as did the planning of artillery bombardments, for example by the British at El Alamein in Egypt in late 1942. Greater tactical and operational mobility in World War Two were factors, but the similarities between the world wars can be instructive.

There were also maps for more specific purposes. Escape maps were used notably by shot down aircraft crew, first in Britain, where they were initially printed on silk by John Bartholomew and Son as part of its business for the War Office; and then in Germany and the United States. The British produced over 1¾ million copies of about 250 separate escape maps.

The relationship between resources and, on the other hand, the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war were clearly seen in the development of Allied mapping capability and its usage. Whereas Germany, Italy and Japan did not carry out systematic mapping, and generally simply overprinted, copied or enlarged existing maps, the Allies, and notably the Western Allies, carried out much new mapping. Topographic maps were very important both for ground operations and for air offensives. New material was inputted to fighting outcomes, with the British using maps based on new aerial photography in North Africa from 1941. There was much new mapping for subsequent Allied operations in North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific. The scale and sophistication of aerial photography was such that there would have been adequate American mapping for the large-scale invasion of Japan planned for late 1945. In contrast, other commitments, and the loss of the air war, ensured that the Axis powers progressively suffered from a lack of adequate up-to-date aerial photography in order to help land and air operations.

Very differently but, again, capturing the element of reconnaissance and mapping, conflict at sea was increasingly about location. This situation reflected the extent to which surface ships engaged at beyond visual range, as well as the growing role of aircraft carriers and submarines. Aerial reconnaissance and radar were each of great importance. The latter included the use of radar-controlled fire, as on 14 November 1942, off Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands when the radar-controlled fire of the American battleships *Washington* and *South Dakota* hit hard the Japanese battleship *Kirishima*. It capsized on 15 November. Japanese battleships lacked radar-controlled fire. This night engagement was crucial to the American success in fighting on land on the island in January 1943. Until reliable, all-weather, day-and-night, reconnaissance and strike aircraft were available, which was really only in the 1950s, surface ships provided the prime means of fighting at night, although the highly-successful British carrier attack on Italian warships in the harbour at Taranto in 1940 was mounted at night. Moreover, some carrier aircraft carried radar.

On 24 May 1941, a British squadron sent to intercept the battleship *Bismarck*, the leading surface ship in the German navy, as it tried to enter the North Atlantic in order to attack trans-Atlantic shipping routes, was helped by radar in shadowing it off Iceland, only to suffer serious loss in the subsequent gunnery exchange, notably with the sinking of the battlecruiser *Hood*. The *Bismarck* was eventually sunk on 27 May by a far larger British fleet and thanks to both aircraft and gunnery.

Alongside the use of intelligence, mostly from interceptions, air power played a key role in resisting the German submarine assault, notably by identifying the target and rapidly attacking it. Nevertheless, accurate navigation over water proved a problem for the RAF, with many missions ending as 'Convoy Not Found.'

In 1942, in contrast, there were marked improvements in British anti-submarine naval capability, including the increased use of shipborne radar and better sonar detection equipment. This very local locational information powerfully supplemented that from signals intelligence, which was less specific. In turn, enhanced weaponry, notably effective ahead-throwing, depth-charge launchers and more powerful depth-charges, as well as accumulated experience, gave effect to this information and capability.

Similarly with anti-submarine air resources. Again, very local target-finding was important, including ASV MK II radar and better searchlights. As a reminder that locational identification was part of a struggle between applied technologies, this radar lost its potency when the Germans were able to introduce listening receivers on U-boats. In turn, in March 1943, the MK III radar, which could not be detected by these receivers, proved a crucial addition. Radar sets small enough to be carried by aircraft, a key feature of applied capability, and yet capable of picking up submarine periscopes at five miles, were a crucial tool.

Precision locational and navigational information, including on the weather, was necessary for air as well as naval warfare. This information became more significant as the scale of each type of warfare increased. This was particularly the case to the end of the war with air warfare. Target identification on air raids was not easy, while there were also serious problems with accuracy. The British wished to destroy industrial targets in Germany, but the Butt Report on night raids in June-July 1941 showed that they were not doing so. Accuracy was difficult with night-time freefall bombing, and, also, despite American bombsights, with daytime bombing, for there was no electronic navigation or target identification, and the Allies did not have guided bombs. Instead, concerned about the daytime vulnerability of their bombers, the British focused, from March 1942, on night-time area bombing. Cities were ranked on their economic importance as targets. The capacity of bombers increased thanks to the use of four-engined aircraft. However, although the American B-17 'Flying Fortress' was a steady platform that could carry a large bomb load, precision bombing was not easy. Indeed, with bombs with lethal radii measured in only a few tens of feet, a bombing tactic that involved bombardment squadrons all dropping simultaneously could not be accurately described as precision. Locational information, the instant mapping of a raid as it proceeded by navigators working with precise maps, was important. However, there were problems for the Allies with identifying the target, even in daylight and without anti-aircraft guns or enemy fighters, and accuracy remained heavily dependent on the skill of the pathfinder aircraft that preceded the bombers in order to identify targets.

Mapping was crucial for defence against air attack, as well as for attack. This was more than simply about technical developments. Mapping is a prod-

uct and aspect of information systems, a creation of them, and a means to their success. This was clearly shown with the Battle of Britain in 1940. Germany had radar, but it was not yet available to help the *Luftwaffe*. In a serious intelligence failure, the Germans underrated the size, sophistication, and strength of the British defence and, in particular, failed to understand the role of British radar and radar stations, and their place in the integrated air-defence system, a system of information, analysis, and response. This control system, with its plotters of opposing moves and its telephone lines, was an early instance of the network-enabled capability seen in the 2000s with its plasma screens and secure data links. In each case, the targeting, sensors, and shooters, were linked through a network that included the decision-maker. In 1940, able command decisions and good intelligence were thus linked through a system that was effective for analysis and response.

In turn, in response to the Allied air offensive, and helped by the depth given by their conquests in 1940, the Germans developed a complex and wide-ranging system of radar warning, with long-range, early-warning radars, as well as short-range radars that guided night fighters (which also had their own radars) toward the bombers. This helped cause heavy Allied losses. Radar-defence systems could be wrecked by the British use of ‘window’: strips of aluminium foil that appeared like bombers on the radar screens. However, in the autumn of 1943, the Germans adapted their radar to circumvent this. In turn, that November, the British began to fly electronic countermeasures aircraft.

The German ability to ‘map’ a raid as it was proceeding was not matched by Japan, which, with a bigger space to defend, totally lacked the integrated nature of the German defence system. Moreover, Japanese airfields were without protective radar, which ensured that Allied aircraft were able to mount successful raids, for example, crucially, on the New Guinea airfield at Wewak in August 1943; after which Allied ground operations in New Guinea were rarely threatened by Japanese aircraft.

The more general need to adapt tactics in order to use information more effectively was seen in the American air attack on Japan. Initially, from November 1944, the American raids were long-distance (from bases on the recently-conquered island of Saipan) and unsupported by fighter cover, as fighter range was less than that of bombers. This led to American attacks

from a high altitude, which, however, reduced their effectiveness. The raids that were launched were also hindered by poor weather, especially cloudy conditions; by strong tailwinds; and by difficulties with the B-29's reliability; as well as the general problems of precision bombing given the technology of the period. From February 1945, there was a switch to low-altitude night-time area-bombing of Japanese cities, which, from April, were supported by fighters from the newly-captured island of Iwo Jima. The value of the maps of Japanese cities thus depended heavily on the broader strategic situation and its consequences for the resources that could be applied.

The increased volume of ground-support by Allied aircraft also relied on information systems that included maps. The effectiveness of Allied ground support over Normandy in 1944 owed much to the long-term process of gaining air superiority over the *Luftwaffe*, but there had also been improvements in doctrine and organisation, including the use of air liaison teams with ground forces, as well as improvements in radio communication. Both attacks on specific targets and 'carpet bombing' relied on mapping. The latter was important to the American breakout from Normandy. Despite failures in coordination that led to 'friendly-fire' casualties, notably in the breakout from the Cotentin, the Allies had become far more skilled at integrating their forces.

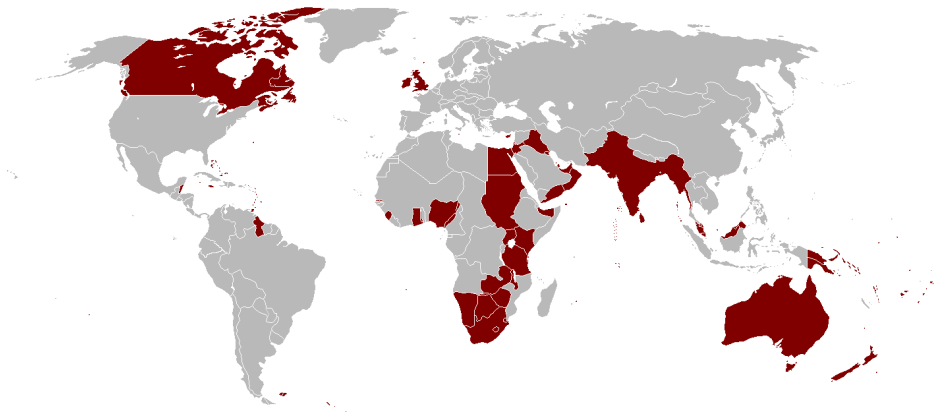
Separately to maps, the use of reconnaissance to prepare models as aids to the planning of attacks and bombardment was frequent. Relief models were used by both the Allies and the Axis. They helped prepare air attacks, for example on Pearl Harbor (1941) and the German dams successfully attacked by the British Dambusters (1943). Models were also used to help ground forces, whether attacking defended coastlines, as with Anglo-American forces invading Sicily (1943) and Normandy (1944), or advancing overland, as with the Soviet attacks on Finnish defences in 1940 and on Berlin in 1945.

Maps were also important in propaganda, which served military as well as civilian morale. For example, large maps were placed in the centres of the most important Italian cities, a practice begun with the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-6. The practice was resumed in 1940, ending in 1943. Maps were a significant weapon on the Home Front of all the combatants. Their purpose, practicality and value therefore were multifaceted.



9

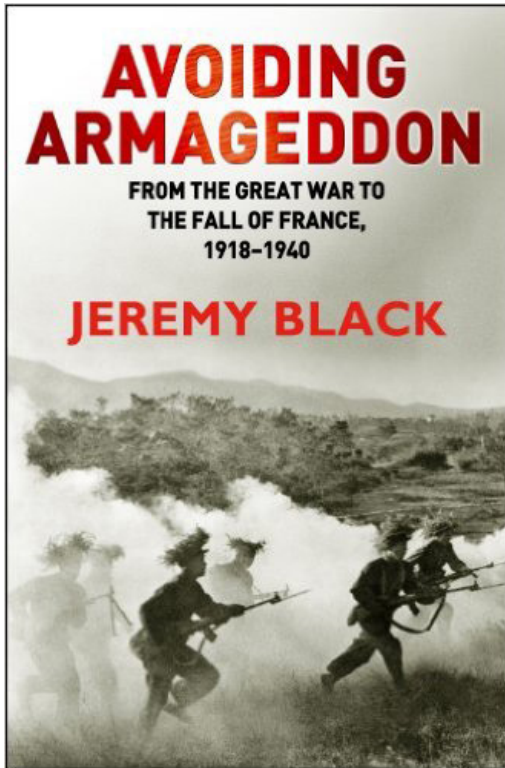
The ‘What Ifs?’ of Strategic Planning Interwar Imperial Defence¹



This paper focuses on speculations in the 1920s and 1930s about the next war centring on the problems created for Britain by uncertainty over which power would be their leading opponent. Much of the discussion on the British military in this period focuses on the question of whether the correct responses were made to the possibilities of new technology, notably in the shape of aircraft and tanks. This question looks toward the issue of the British responses to the German and Japanese offensives in 1940-2, and, notably, the problem of the ability to adapt to the challenges of *blitzkrieg*.

These questions are indeed valuable. However, they should be regarded as linked to, indeed subordinate to, the tasking of the military, and notably the question of likely opponents. In short, technology and politics need to be reconciled, with strategy as the active response to the geopolitical challenges faced, and strategic planning a key context for procurement, training and deployment.

¹ Published in V. Ilari (ed.), *Future Wars. Storia della distopia militare*, Quaderno Sism 2016, pp. 379-386.



An indicative, and far from exhaustive list, of specific concerns and tasks is useful. The First World War ended in 1918. Tasks in 1919-21 included occupation responsibilities, notably in Germany but also in Turkey, wideranging participation in the Russian Civil War, conflict with Afghanistan, instability in the Punjab, rebellion in Ireland, Iraq and Egypt, and challenges to British interests in Iran. 1922-30 again saw a range of issues, including concern about the possibility of war with Turkey over, first, Constantinople and the Dardanelles and, subsequently, its border with Iraq, as well as instability in the Arabian peninsula, and attacks on British interests

in China. In 1931-8, Japanese, Italian and German expansionism were all serious problems for British interests and views on international relations. There were also rebellions or disturbances in the British empire, notably on the North-West Frontier of India and in Palestine, but also in Jamaica, Malta and Myanmar.

This incomplete list leaves out the possibility that tensions or disputes with other major powers, notably France and the United States, might lead to conflict. With hindsight, and notably in light of the developing challenges in the 1930s, these scenarios might appear implausible, but they led not only to speculation but also to planning, notably to American plans for war with Britain, including the invasion of Canada.

The variety of these challenges helps explain why it was so difficult to determine strategy. Military historians considering this period are apt to underplay the challenge of rebellion and to focus on symmetrical conflict between the conventional forces of independent states, but that was not a certainty

as far as British planners were concerned. Instead, they had to consider the hypotheticals of future conflict in such circumstances against the more pressing immediate issues of security within the empire. These latter issues were enhanced because of the extent to which the army was responsible for what in effect was civil policing.

Moreover, the reliance of the British imperial system on native troops, notably in South Asia, underlined the need to emphasise the security of relevant areas, while also ensuring that certain tasks were best suited to a large part of the army and, conversely, others to only a part of it. The same was not the case for the navy or the air force, and this point underlines the very different strategic dimensions of the particular branches of the military. British concern with empire reflected the experience of the First World War, when the empire had provided crucial support, in men, money and supplies, in Europe. Thus, the empire was both a source of weakness through over-extension, and of strength. This paradox was highly important.

The concerns of imperial defence when faced by 'native' opposition helped explain the reluctance of some generals to engage with what they saw as the hypotheticals of developing tank forces for conflict in Europe. An appreciation of the operational possibilities of the tank was seen within the army by practical modernisers, but they had to be more aware of financial restrictions than the publicists criticising from outside, notably Basil Liddell Hart.

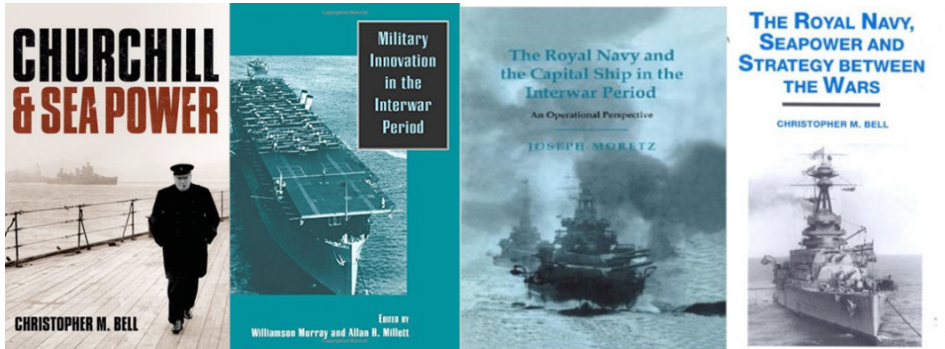
Imperial defence, moreover, encouraged an emphasis on air power as the best means to deter or fight Germany. This was a reflection of the most worrying aspect of German power, the potential strength of its air force. Moreover, air attack could not be deterred by France's landward defences, notably the Maginot Line.

Hitler came to power in 1933 pledged to overthrow the Versailles settlement. Given the later situation, this might appear clearly to have been the foremost threat to the international order and British interests; but Germany only turned to war in 1939, whereas Japan did so in 1931 and Italy in 1935. Each of these challenged British interests and Britain's ideas of international order and relations, and threatened to lead to further problems. Indeed, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China in 1937 while Italy encouraged Arab opposition to British control.



Strategic uncertainty therefore surrounded the prioritisation of the challenge posed by these three powers. This uncertainty was enhanced by a lack of clarity as to how these powers would respond to negotiations and/or pressure, by a corresponding lack of clarity as to whether they would co-operate with each other, and by the presence of other threats, notably Russia. Thus, rearmament was affected not only by limitations in industrial capacity and capability, and by financial problems, but also by a lack of certainty over tasking and appropriate force structure. Clarity over allies and enemies was necessary in order to produce effective strategic plans.

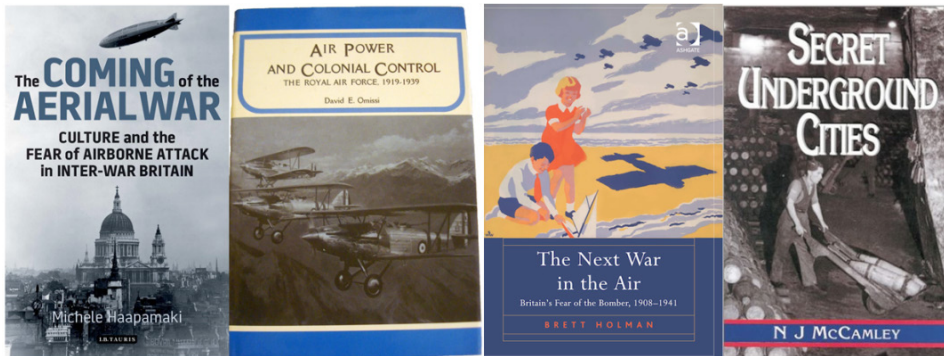
Hitler's rhetoric was far from encouraging but, to some, he appeared a possible element in any co-operation against the Soviet Union, while there was also the question of how best to reintegrate Germany into the international order. It was unclear whether Hitler would be another Napoleon III or, indeed, another Mussolini. In 1933, the British were unwilling to make common cause with France towards Germany, and this remained their policy. More robust policies focused on alliance with France were rejected. Moreover, the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935 was regarded by the French as a betrayal. In 1936, when Germany unilaterally remilitarised the Rhineland, providing a springboard for action against France, the British sought to discourage the French from acting. Western passivity in 1936 marked a major step in Nazi expansionism. Differences between Britain and France in their views of European development, the very limited nature of Anglo-French military co-operation over the previous decade, and their lack of preparedness, were understood by contemporaries as a poor basis for joint action.



There was already an instance of Versailles revisionism having worked. The 1920 Sèvres peace settlement with Turkey had been overthrown as a result of Ataturk's successes in 1922 and a very different settlement negotiated at Lausanne in 1923. This then had served as the basis for a workable international relationship. Whether the same would be true with Japan prior to 1937, Germany prior to 1939, and Italy prior to 1940 was unclear.

If Japan was the leading challenge to Britain, then the principal response would be naval, specifically the development of a powerful naval base in Singapore such that it could be used to defend the British empire in South-East Asia, Australasia and India from Japanese attack, while also serving for force-projection to East Asian waters. This naval policy had many aspects and variants, including a network of bases to support the movement of warships and aircraft, co-operation with Australia, New Zealand and Canada against Japan, and alliance with the United States. There were also obvious military priorities, notably a lack of any need to focus on the army other than to supplement naval priorities.

Italy posed a similar, but different, set of priorities. The much expanded Italian navy represented a major threat to the British in the Mediterranean and, with that, to the British route to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal. At the same time, war over the Abyssinian Crisis in 1935-6 would also have involved both army and air force, as, indeed, war with Italy was to do from 1940. The army would need to defend Egypt, Sudan, British Somaliland and Kenya from invasion from the Italian colonies of Libya, Eritrea and Sudan, while the air force would help protect the colonies, including Malta, and would also be used to bomb Italy.



Germany also posed a naval challenge, but the German navy appeared weaker as a strategic challenge than those of Japan and Italy, because, until the conquest of Denmark, Norway and France in 1940, Germany lacked significant naval room for manoeuvre or access to the North Atlantic. Nevertheless, despite its strength as the world's foremost naval power, Britain did not have a navy capable of fighting Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously. That was the product of the stop on capital ship construction under the Washington Naval Treaty, as well as the lack of sufficient British industrial capability and fiscal strength; but also of the build-up of the strength of these three powers. However, to expect the arithmetic of naval power to provide for conflict at once with all three states was to anticipate a margin of superiority that was unreasonable given the state of the country and the fact that the potential enemies were well apart, but also one that diplomacy sought to avoid the need for. Allowing for the significance and consequences of serious rivalries between the views of the key ministries, the Treasury, Foreign Office and Admiralty, British naval strategy planned that, if necessary, operations against threats arising simultaneously would be conducted sequentially in separate theatres. This strategy assumed that operational flexibility could help lessen the constraints posed by tough fiscal limits. In addition, war, it was hoped, was likely to bring Britain the support of allies, notably France against Germany and Italy, and the United States against Japan.

From Germany, it was the *Luftwaffe* that was a threat in a way that the Italian, Japanese and, indeed, Soviet air forces could not be to Britain itself. As a result, the strategic need for air-defence was dependent on the prospect

of war with Germany. Whereas aircraft could be moved, radar stations were fixed facilities. Thus, defence of Britain, as opposed to that of particular imperial interests, however crucial, involved very different means as well as ends.

The challenge from Germany was also linked to views about the European order and Britain's relationship to it. Italy alone might be a threat to Albania (1939) and try to be one to Greece (1940), but, alone, was not likely to prevail against France and, indeed, did not seek to do so. Instead, it was Germany that posed the major threat to other states in Western Europe, and Germany and the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. The question of whether Britain should send troops to the Continent to counter such a threat was a difficult one, and not least because there was no peacetime conscription, while the Indian army was not to be deployed in Western Europe. With Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway resolved to remain neutral, the sole room for manoeuvre would be France and the strategic option of the buildup of a large army in Britain to send to France was not an encouraging one in light of the range of British commitments.

Thus, speculations about the next war related practically not only to the issue of what weapons systems could achieve, in absolute and relative terms, but what they would be expected to achieve in light of specific tasks. The hypotheticals interacted in an extraordinarily dynamic situation. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to point to serious flaws in the decisions taken by British policymakers, but it is also worth underlining the difficulties of assessing links between challenges and commitments, as well as the problems of prioritisation. This is instructive because it prepared the way for the position today, and the multiple uncertainties for Western powers. Much of the value of history rests in its capacity to help us understand issues in the modern world. In this case, the latter also assists greatly in an appreciation of the issues of the past.



10

Resources Versus Fighting Quality: Rethinking World War II ¹

The importance of artillery in 20th Century warfare

Since we are in an artillery school, I thought that I would start by making some comments about artillery because, as you will be well aware, artillery plays a key role in 20th century warfare; it is the largest killer of people in both World War I and World War II. However it tends to be underrated in non-specialist works and to be given very much less coverage than the tank. If you compare the number of books on tanks in World War II with the number on artillery, you will find it's extraordinarily salutary.

Although I am not a specialist on artillery, as you are, I want to offer a view of artillery in World War II that doesn't tend to be offered in the literature. One of the ways to re-evaluate artillery on land is to look at the significance of artillery at sea. The standard post-war orthodoxy is that the battleship was useless, that air power had come along and completely changed the situation, and that those who stayed with battleships were stupid, living in the past, and planning for the last war. And World War II proved this.

You will have seen dramatic Japanese photos of the air attack on HMS Prince of Wales off Malaya in December 1941. She was essentially Britain's best battleship at that time, certainly its most modern battleship, and she went down. This supposedly proves the obsolescence of the battleship, and indeed 1960 is the year in which the last British battleship was scrapped. They were regarded as redundant, stupid and anachronistic.

¹ Winter Lectures Wednesday 15 January 2020 at the Royal School of Artillery in Larkhill. This will appear in *2020 Annual Proceedings of the RA Historical Society* early in 2021. We are grateful to Lt Col Richard Clayton for kindly granting us, on behalf of the RA Historical Association, to publish this preview text in this collection of essays by Prof. Black.

Well let's just think about that for a second. The battleship in World War II is the classic form of artillery used by the British and the Americans for supporting amphibious operations. The Germans had taken over Western Europe – as they had not done in World War I - and therefore, complex amphibious operations were absolutely crucial to any attempt to drive them out. Obviously crossing the killing ground is always a problem on land but crossing the killing ground is an even bigger problem if you have to get out of boats, wade ashore, and then cross a beach or foreshore.

Some years ago, I was talking to somebody who had been on Sword Beach and he was telling me that it was great to hear the boom of the guns firing from HMS Warspite. You can understand that if you think of the size of the ordnance being fired from the battleships. In fact the last great concentration of the Royal Navy in wartime and the largest number of ships concentrated at any one moment was for the '44 D Day landings.

Against this number of ships, the Atlantic Wall had major problems. It was built using quite advanced techniques for that period from ferro-concrete and was more resilient than people had anticipated. You can go along to Omaha Beach, for example, and you can see that many of the defences that encountered fire nevertheless survived. While this is true, the effects on the troops inside the fortifications that were hit was pretty traumatic to put it mildly. And of course a lot of the defences didn't survive. On Omaha Beach, the best guns the Germans had were two 88mm guns whereas they were being fired at by about 109 guns from Allied battleships and monitors.² And the same was true on the other beaches..

The thing that went wrong was the decision to place increased emphasis on air attack. Omaha was the classic example of this and there's an excellent book about it by US Army Colonel (Retd) Adrian Lewis³. The problem with air attack as opposed to battleship artillery is that aircraft can only be over the target for a brief period of time, because of issues of range and fuel. During

2 Monitors are close inshore, shallow draft vessels which carry generally one, or sometimes more, large calibre guns so they have the fire power of battleships but without the seaworthiness.

3 *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* by Adrian R. Lewis. Pub Publisher: University North Carolina. 2003. ISBN-13: 978-0807854693.

that short period, unless they were heavy bombers, World War II planes only had a limited number of dumb bombs ie freefall not guided bombs. And they were not particularly accurate. This assumes that one is not up against defensive anti-aircraft fire, although at D-Day there really wasn't any anti-aircraft fire of any significance. However you could not be certain that this was going to be the case. The battleship is therefore one of the prime artillery systems of World War II; it is too easy just to talk about the demise of the Prince of Wales.

Much more interesting is what happened to the battleships, both American like the USS Missouri, and British like the Duke of York, that were battering away at Japan in the last weeks of World War II. These battleships were under attack by kamikaze planes. I once gave a lecture standing on the Missouri in Pearl Harbor, and you can still see where a kamikaze plane hit her deck. It did some damage, but the ship was able to keep on going as it has an armoured deck. The Japanese also had a certain number of rather curious guided rockets which a man actually sat on: a kind of kamikaze rocket. The point is that, even with the Japanese using these weapons, by 1945 battleships were able to fight them off.

Take the USS Wisconsin – and you can go and visit the Wisconsin at Norfolk, Virginia – to enable it to cope with the Japanese air attacks, what they did was simply to increase its anti-aircraft artillery. To the very formidable ordinance for battering coastal defences on this huge 57,500 ton ship, they added loads and loads and loads of anti-aircraft guns. The crew went up to 3000, an enormous number, largely because of this. This is also the beginning of the technique we used successfully in the Falklands against Argentinian air attack and again in the Gulf whereby you picket the bigger ships with smaller anti-aircraft ships which can fire at enemy aircraft. Once people had realised that you just needed more anti-aircraft artillery to complement the big guns, the number of Allied capital ships sunk in the second half of the war absolutely slumped. You know all about the use of artillery on land in World War II, but do also think about battleships.

I used to give a course on World War II and tell my students that the most underrated weapon of World War II was the anti-tank gun. You see all this amazing footage from Japanese and German war films, which essentially we stole – sorry – captured at the end of the war, showing German tanks charging

across the plains of Central Europe. However, as the Germans discovered on the Eastern Front, actually tanks are not much good unless supported by infantry and artillery of their own. They were certainly ineffective against anti-tank defences and the Soviets were pretty good at those.

Resources versus fighting qualities: rethinking the World War II

What I want to do in the rest of my time is to look at the question of resources rather than fighting quality. I want really to ask the question why did the Allies win.

In 1988 a book came out which sold more than a million copies in hard-copy in the United States alone – Paul Kennedy’s *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*⁴ – and in a way it defined but also repeated the standard view about both war and World War II, which is that resources were a key component, if not the key component, to victory. Kennedy produced graphs showing how many tanks, artillery pieces, aircraft, and aircraft carriers the two sides had in World War II and said it was inevitable which side was going to win. This was very much the historical orthodoxy, and this is still true to a considerable extent. If you’re looking at World War II or military history as a whole from the point of view of the general punter, the idea is that resources are the key factor and of course that’s linked to the nature of modern society; the idea that in a way Rosie the Riveter won the war.

Rosie the Riveter is based on a real woman actually – a riveter is somebody that puts rivets to hold steel plates together on a ship. The Americans built victory ships in vast quantities and they produced posters which showed Rosie the Riveter working hard riveting. The idea was: here is the home front and it’s playing a crucial role. This is very much the modern history view, which is very touchy feely. In a sense this idea suited many Western narratives, but also ironically, the idea that the Germans and the Japanese lost because they were out resourced, which funnily enough bought into their myths and their accounts.

⁴ *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, by Paul Kennedy. Pub Random House 1987. ISBN 0-394-54674-1.

Lazy and stupid people will always tell you that the victor writes history. Rubbish, the victor doesn't need to write history; they've won. Why should they care about history if they can enjoy their victory. The people who need to write history are the losers because they need to explain to themselves what has gone wrong. This is the reason that our standard account of the American Civil War is the Confederate account, and our standard account of World War II is the German account.

At the end of the war, if you were a German general and you had any sense, who did you surrender to? The Americans is the correct answer, because you were looked after nicely and you got ice cream. If you couldn't get the Americans, it was the Brits. And after that, if you were unlucky, the French, and then if you were really unlucky, the Soviets. The latter actually hanged some of their captured generals.

The German generals essentially said, "We were brilliant. We were outstanding." People like Manstein said: "Why did we lose? Well, you know; Hitler got it wrong, and there were so many Soviets, and the area was too big and the weather was bad too etc.". In other words, "We were brilliant, but we lost because the other side had more resources." That became the standard German and Japanese account. If you go there, you will hear that.

In a way this view suited us as well for a very specific military reason. After 1955 the largest force of Allied troops in Europe was the Bundeswehr which was based on the Wehrmacht. In addition the Americans were using German World War II generals. Fritz Von Halder, who had been chief of the German general staff, was writing reports for the Americans on how to fight the Soviets. Speidel, who had been Rommel's chief of staff, was prominent and eventually became the head of the Bundeswehr.

It was very important to us to believe that the Soviets could be beaten. This was particularly true after 1949 when the Soviets acquired the atom bomb as a result of treason in Britain and America. That took away the West's prime defensive deterrent. This does not mean that the Allies would have used the atom bomb, but it means that it was necessary for them to consider how to fight a non-nuclear or a sub-nuclear war. The latter meant that you might use nuclear weaponry at the tactical but not the strategic level. It was probably impossible to do this, but nevertheless people like to live in a fantasy world.

On top of that, there was a fascination with the Wehrmacht. There is a very good book by a called Astore⁵, about the Americans' love affair with the Wehrmacht. I don't know whether it's the uniforms, or what it is, but there is this fascination. If you look at which side people choose to play for when they do war games, like Stalingrad, it is interesting that they often choose to play the German rather than the Soviet side. And the German account remains absolutely dominant in interpretations, and to an extent it still does.

Max Hastings produced two books not so long ago, one on the last six months of the war against Germany and one on the same period for Japan. For the one about Germany, he cites evidence from British and American officers that their troops were not enthusiastic about rushing forward, and states, "Well you don't really get that kind of material in the German and Soviet army." I said to my students, "Why wouldn't you get remarks of that type?" They replied: "You are going to get shot".

If I was a Soviet political commissar, my job would be to shoot you once you offered defeatist sentiment of that type. If I was German after the July bomb plot, they'd have what they farcically called a Court of Honour before they strung me up, So in other words, it's a classic example of the extent people have bought into this mythos about the German army. In practical terms, the latter was pretty good tactically, sometimes good and sometimes poor operationally, and pretty bad strategically. The same sort of thing was true in World War One. And what a surprise, the Germans lost both wars.

Let's consider how historically, a different interpretation has been advanced in the specialist literature. Linked at the time to the development of the operational level of war in Western analysis, (the Soviets already had that analysis), in the 1980s the Americans were very interested in studying the Soviet army in World War Two, and in particular the Soviet breakthrough attacks of '44/'45 - Operation BAGRATION⁶ most prominently. Those of the 80s vintage may remember that there was a rise in Cold War animosity and the prospect of war increased, particularly in '83.

5 *American Blitzkrieg: Loving the German War Machine to Death* by Lt Col (Retd) William J. Astore USAF.

6 Operation BAGRATION was the codename for the Soviet 1944 Belorussian Strategic Offensive Operation, a military campaign fought between 23 June and 19 August 1944 in Soviet Belorussia in the Eastern Front of World War II.

There was a hasty dusting down of war plans and another attempt to conceive how it might be possible to fight a non-nuclear war. In fact we now know that the Soviets were going to use nuclear and chemical weapons from Day One. Colonel Glantz⁷ at Fort Leavenworth was tasked with setting up a group to study the Soviet military. He did that through the eighties and then hey presto, at the beginning of the nineties most, but not all, of the Soviet archives were opened, certainly at the tactical and operational level, but not at the strategic level.

Glantz and his group produced analysis after analysis of the campaigns - you can read the books, they're incredibly boring! What they show is that in the early years of World War II, the Soviets had taken heavy casualties, but equally – and Glantz of course re-examined the German archives in this context – the Soviets killed more Germans from Day One than the Germans had anticipated. As a result a rather different picture started to be painted of the military situation on the Eastern Front. Prior to that is their analysis of why the Soviets did so well in '43 and even more '44. The argument was that this was Soviet operational technique, particularly bringing up rear echelons, rather than necessarily achieving numerical superiority.

At the same time people started to relook at the performance of the British and American armies. The usual accounts that have been given are Noddy literature. For those who are young, Noddy is a little character who used to amuse children. The essential argument was that the Germans had totally outfought the Western Allies by using blitzkrieg techniques, and this proved that the Western armies were no good. The same applied to the Japanese beating the British and the Americans in '41 and '42. These battles started to be relooked at by specialists and a number of points, both empirical and consensual, were brought to the fore.

First of all, one should look at the deficiencies of blitzkrieg. Blitzkrieg was very much dependent on the application of the internal combustion engine to pre-existing practices of mobile warfare. It was also very dependent on your opponents doing what you wanted them to do, which meant not having de-

7 Colonel David M. Glantz (born 1942) is an American military historian known for his books on the Red Army during World War II, and the chief editor of *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*.

fence in depth, and defending the wrong area. In 1940, essentially for political reasons, the problem was to make sure that the Dutch and Belgians didn't collapse. So most of the good mobile units in the French army were placed on their extreme left and pushed through onto the Belgian plain, moving as far eastwards as possible, with some British units as well. And that actually turned out to be very convenient for the Germans. The Poles and Yugoslavians defended their entire frontier which left them with no reserves, which again was very convenient for the Germans. It didn't inherently mean that unit for unit when brought into conflict, the Germans were necessarily better and in fact, those of you that are specialists will know that in 1940 British anti-tank units did extremely well against Rommel's advancing forces.

What about with the Japanese? In the late thirties, the major task in which the British and Indian armies were engaged (both British units in India and Indian units under British officers) was on the North West Frontier against the Fakir of Ipi⁸ and his supporters. The Fakir was a kind of Islamic fundamentalist in Waziristan of the age and the British never actually caught him. If you go to that part of the world you will know that the principal problem is somebody firing at you from halfway up a valley and you cannot see them. So what do you do? Standard British technique, which had been developed from the mid-19th century (the second successful advance on Kabul), was to picket the heights. Troops would advance along the heights in parallel with the force in the valley to prevent enemy ambushes.

The major area of weakness in British India was perceived as the North West Frontier, so that's where many troops were located. The major training area for that command was at Quetta, which is dry, arid, high, and treeless. If you then put these soldiers in a jungle in Malaya or Burma, they will not find it easy. The Japanese had trained their army both in Kyushu, which is the southernmost of the main home islands and is heavily tropical, and also in the

8 Ghazi Mirzali Khan (1897-1960), also known as the Faqir of Ipi was a militant and Pash-tun tribal leader from Waziristan in today's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. He settled in Ipi in 1923, near Mirali in North Waziristan, from where he started a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the British Empire. In 1938, Mirzali Khan shifted from Ipi to Gurwek, a remote village in North Waziristan on the border with Afghanistan, where he declared an independent state and continued the raids against the British Empire from bases in Afghanistan. © Wikipedia.

big wooded areas in the centre of Honshu, so they knew how to operate in the jungle. They were also well blooded as their units had been fighting in China since 1937 and, not surprisingly, they did well.

The British used a standard technique in the jungle putting defensive positions across roads, generally behind a bridge, with the artillery being used to protect these positions. So what did the Japanese do? They come through the jungle on either side of the road and they shot you up so you had to keep pulling back until you were stuffed. This gradually culminated in a loss of morale. The same thing happened to the Americans in the Philippines. Consequently it was easy to understand the idea that the Japanese were better than you.

But what happened subsequently? Some years ago, I was a visiting professor at the Australian defence force place in Canberra, and since I had time to spare in the afternoon, I went to the archives and read the after-action reports from New Guinea. After-action reports, as you know if you've had to write them, have to be accurate. The Australian reports on New Guinea in '42 said, "We were not very good; we were being out-fought". This is not surprising, because, despite the idea that they present to you of all being like Crocodile Dundee, most Australians are urbanites. And they weren't used to the jungle and had no idea how to fight in New Guinea, which has horrible problems with yellow fever, malaria, and dysentery etc.

You then move forward to '43 and, even more, '44. Here the Australians commented that they had learned to deal with the jungle, but that the Japanese were still attacking in the same way. The standard Japanese system was to get as close as possible to you using forest cover, try and outflank you and then at the last minute charge in, shouting very loudly to try and disorientate you and coming into contact as quickly as possible.

What the Australians had done is first of all to realise that linear defences in the jungle were a waste of time and that you needed to be prepared to be attacked from any point of the compass and therefore have all round concentric fire zones. You also needed to be willing to go into the jungle first for reconnaissance patrols and then for what they called fighting patrols, and that you just had to hack it. In other words you weren't able to sit there and protect yourself in safety so you might as well contest the jungle with the other side.

By late '43 the Japanese in New Guinea were getting thrashed. The same

thing happened in Burma; nothing much happened in 1942, there was a little bit of fighting in '43 around the Arakan, but most of the major fighting was not until '44.

The thing that people never talk about in World War II is training. There are two very good books on the training of the British Army in '43, one is by a Brit called Tim Morman, and the other by an American called Daniel Marston⁹. Although writing independently of each other, they both talk about how units trained for jungle fighting. This is not as easy as it sounds; people tend to wander off in all directions and you don't want to kill your own troops. Because of low cloud, you are often fighting in areas where you can't rely on air support and, even if you have air support, it's not brilliant in deep dense jungle conditions.

By '44, the Brits grew to be good at jungle fighting. On the Allied side essentially civilian armies were created as a result of conscription either just before the war by the British, or while the war is going on by most of the Commonwealth countries, and also by the Americans, although India remained a volunteer army. You take civilians and initially things are tricky but you get them trained up and you're able to benefit from a number of factors, obviously better weapons and in a sense more weapons is an advantage, but you are also able to benefit from command systems in which people are promoted on their merits. You try being a meritorious socialist or Jew in the German army in World War II!

There is a very good book on General Ronald Adam¹⁰ who was Adjutant General in the British army in World War II about the way in which he was determined to push forward people of talent. This meant that he felt he had to break the regimental system for the duration of the war and force people to take important posts with other battalions and regiments, rather than their

9 Marston, D 2016, 'Learning and adapting for jungle warfare, 1942-45: The Australian and British Indian Armies', in P.J. Dean (ed.), *Australia 1944-45: Victory in the Pacific*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Australia, pp. 121-144.

10 General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, 2nd Baronet, GCB, DSO, OBE (1885-1982) was a senior British Gunner officer. He had an important influence on the conduct of the British Army during the Second World War as a result of his long tenure as Adjutant-General, responsible for the army's organisation and personnel, from June 1941 until the end of the war, and was as a close confidant of Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, the CIGS. © Wikipedia.

own. You get the same thing with Montgomery; when he took over in the Western desert, he had to sack a lot of tank colonels.

There is an excellent essay by David French¹¹ on Churchill and the army. Including non-postings like being sent to be military governor of Barbados, French calculated that Churchill sacked 326 generals. This is not surprising. People who were absolutely fit for purpose in the 1930s to deal say with the Arab uprising in Palestine or the Fakir of Ipi, may not be fit for purpose in a different theatre. The point is that the British army was able to do this, helped by being run by a coalition government, which was an enormous advantage. They were able to call on most of the talent in society.

The British did not have the same degree of problems that the Germans had; here you had to fit in with the ideology of the regime to get on. You could stand up to Hitler, particularly up to the summer of '44, and he might just put you on furlough as happened to Runstedt in '41 and Manstein in '44. But on the whole if you weren't a Nazi member, you were not going to get very far, which does tend to be forgotten. The Germans have this hilarious idea of the good German and the bad German in World War II. However about nine million people were members of the Nazi party, so pretty well any adult male who wasn't in prison was going to be a member of the party.

You had better commanders on the British side working their way through the army and you had better fighting quality and training. The previous 'silo' approach had been broken down and you saw that particularly with the British in the Western desert. The silo approach meant non-combined operations, in which the tanks were contemptuous of the infantry and of the artillery. That was broken down fairly quickly. The Soviets and Americans were both good at combined operations. People developed the idea of making their artillery more mobile and adding in self-propelled guns. This was done differently in different countries. In Germany, the self-propelled guns are considered as part of the artillery and not part of the tank force.

The German strategy was another factor. If the Germans had been thoughtful, which they were not, they would have noticed by 1939 why it really wasn't going to work for them. In Summer 1936 a full scale war between China

11 *Raising Churchill's Army: The British Army and the War Against Germany 1919-1945* by David French. Pub OUP 2000. ISBN-13: 978-0199246304.

and Japan began, and in '37 the Japanese took out Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing in that order. They destroyed the Chinese Central Army, which was the best army in China, and the Germans knew a lot about that because they had trained the Central Army. In 1938 they pressed on to capture Guangzhou (Canton), and Wuhan and in 1939, Hainan and a few other places. But have they won? No. The Chinese go on fighting and the Japanese have absolutely no strategy to stop them. As you will know, at the strategic level – and I'm primarily a strategist – it is important to kill the other side and to show you're willing to kill them and it is important to capture territory. However the way to win a war is by forcing and intimidating an enemy, and coercing him into accepting your will which stops him fighting you. And the Japanese had no idea how to do that, nor had the Germans.

Let us take two German examples. In the spring of 1941, in what is probably one of the most efficient campaigns of World War II, the Germans took Yugoslavia. They had help from the Italians, the Hungarians and Bulgarians, but quite frankly that wasn't worth much. The Wehrmacht attacked an army of roughly 19 divisions. Not all of them were fighting – the Croats weren't really interested in fighting, but the Serbs were. The Wehrmacht conquered Yugoslavia with fewer than 200 of their own fatalities. Brilliant? Well no. The Wehrmacht (and here we are not talking about the SS) then started shooting Serbs. These were not Jews but Serb orthodox people. They killed about 11,000 pretty promptly. And what a surprise, the Serbs didn't like this and a resistance war began, particularly in Serbia and Montenegro.

By the end of that year the Germans were using a third of a million troops, that's more than three times the size of the modern British Army, in a vain attempt to hold down Yugoslavia. They're holding down the major cities and major routes but that is it. We are not talking about key or elite German units here; we are talking about bog standard units but nevertheless, those men would have been useful elsewhere. And that continued until the Germans pulled out of Yugoslavia in '44. So it was a strategic disaster, the Germans did not understand how to persuade people to accept their will.

The Soviet Union in 1941 is an even better example. The Germans tried to capture Moscow, but they couldn't because they had got their strategy wrong. But in theory if they had done it totally differently, they should have been able to do so. But I don't think it would have made any difference. The Soviet

regime hadn't crumbled. They had already picked a new centre of government on the Upper Volga, to where most of their ministries had already gone. Most of the war factories, including all the tank ones, had moved near the Urals where there were great iron supplies and metallurgical industries, and the Soviets would have just gone on fighting. And the Germans again had no answer to this.

Like the Japanese, the Germans had a totally flawed interpretation of people. The essential view was that the Soviets were 'Untermenschen'¹², and Russia was run by Slavs and Jews (which was a surprise to Stalin), and they were generally third rate. The Germans also believed that the British were corrupt and sunk into a sort of debauchery of consumerism, and that the Americans were deracinated. In other words, for Hitler and for the Japanese, any state which had interbreeding of different ethnicities was bound to be a bad thing. So therefore, the Germans and the Japanese thought that clearly they were superior people, clearly their will would be triumphant and obviously they were going to win.

Well no; not only were they strategically flawed in that sense but they really hadn't worked out how to win. So what could have helped them? Firstly it would have helped if the Germans and the Japanese had cooperated better. Hitler never took the trouble to consult the Japanese and didn't tell them he was going to attack Russia, which is why Japan signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviets in the spring of '41. The Soviets did not actually fight the Japanese until August 45.

Unfortunately it was the British who were in the weakest position as we were under most stress. And there is one moment when we were really weak. On 5 April 1942, five Japanese aircraft carriers sailed into the Bay of Bengal, and air attacks from them took out a British carrier, HMS Hermes, and two British heavy cruisers. Admiral Somerville ordered the Indian Ocean fleet to scatter. The Japanese gained air superiority over Madras (Chennai) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and on April 9, Alanbrooke wrote in his diary, "Reports coming

12 Untermensch (German underman, sub-man, subhuman; plural: Untermenschen) is a term that became infamous when the Nazis used it to describe non-Aryan "inferior people" often referred to as "the masses from the East", that is Jews, Roma, and Slavs – mainly Poles, Serbs, and later also Russians. © Wikipedia

in that 60,000 Japanese troops are on their way to invade Ceylon". In fact, on April 9, the Japanese turned east. That is the last time the Japanese sent a carrier into the Indian Ocean. And indeed, four of those 5 carriers were sunk at the Battle of Midway that summer. The Germans and Japanese never really work out how to cooperate – I'm not saying it would have been easy, in fact I think it would have been extraordinarily difficult - but they did not do so.

In contrast, the Allies did better. Stalin was a pathological murderer and went on spying on the British and the Americans all through the war, but Churchill's view that he had to be kept in the war on the Allied side was correct. Large quantities of military supplies were sent to the Soviet Union, which is important particularly in areas where they're not particularly strong – trucks and logistics for example. Vast quantities of material went along the Trans Alaska Highway, and across the Bering Strait into Siberia. Large quantities were sent through Iran, which is why it was occupied by the Allies, and large quantities on the arctic convoys to Murmansk and Archangel. All this was very significant assistance to the Soviets. After the war of course they ignored it, but it was extraordinarily important. For example, a sixth of the Soviet heavy tanks at the Battle for Moscow in December 1941 were British.

The cooperation between the British and Americans was even more effective. The Americans were irritating to the British. They made it clear that they didn't like the British Empire and they did not trust the British over the Mediterranean, but nevertheless they did cooperate. Operations such as HUSKY, the attack on Sicily in '43, and obviously D Day, are probably the greatest examples in history of successful coalition operations, at the strategic, operational and tactical levels and involving all services. The Allies were considerably better at coalition operations and their success was quite astonishing.

Things could have gone wrong; the biggest strategic disaster for the West was Stalin's willingness to do a deal with Hitler in August 1939 - the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Stalin was absolutely gung-ho for it: he was very anti-British and very anti-Western liberalism. It's absolute rubbish to say that he was pushed into this by British and French unwillingness. Stalin was actually very, very keen to see the British and French empires fall apart. And of course, neither the British nor the French had a viable strategy in late '39 or '40.

Although the fall of France was a strategic disaster, we wouldn't have won

but for the fall of France, because we had no way to defeat Germany while the Germans were allied to the Soviets. The Soviets were producing oil and resources and the Germans were able to fight a one front war, all of which was extremely damaging to the Western Allies. As I said earlier we really don't know enough about the strategic side with the Soviets. What is really interesting is that in both '42 and '43 there were soundings between the Germans and the Soviets. In early '43 Stalin definitely offered Hitler peace on the basis of the Germans evacuating the Soviet Union.

As far as Stalin was concerned, he wanted to see the Germans and the Western Allies fight each other to the death: a standard communist approach.

The British picked up on this. You get reports coming back from Sir Stafford Cripps in Moscow, where he was British ambassador, and he was very keen to tell Churchill that the Soviets were talking to the Germans. We simply don't know how much the Soviets were really interested in this - whether it was a ploy, or whether it was an attempt to put pressure on the British to bring forward the second front. There are some other aspects of World War II we still don't know much about. For instance there are no reliable studies on the war in China in 1942, or even '44 either. There was an enormous Japanese offensive Operation ICHI-GO in 1944 for example which is very important, but we know little about it.

What we do know in the specialist literature - I'm not talking about the rubbish you'll read on the airport book stand - is that the complacency that used to greet the standard interpretation of the war, which was that the British, the Soviets and the Americans weren't very good and they won because they out-produced the other side, is actually not a sound interpretation. You can ask John Buckley when he comes to talk about it, because he has done some very important work about 21st Army Group and their fighting efficiency against the Germans. And although this may shock you because you may be used to the standard interpretation, I am afraid that the standard interpretation is wrong.

There's much I haven't covered, like the intelligence side; I'm just trying to give you some ideas. If you are interested, there are several books by me on military history which deal with some of these issues.

Thank you very much.

QUESTIONS

Rodney Atwood:

Does the Battle of El Alamein bear out the traditional interpretation? The British had vastly more men, and vastly more resources but the initial plan fails and it turns it into a sloggish match, The British fight very well, and Rommel makes a mistake when he comes back from his sickbed.

Lecturer:

The point is that within two weeks the Germans have been defeated. Their main field army in North Africa had been scattered, and they've lost lots of equipment and troops. Yes, of course you deploy more resources if you've got them, as the Germans would do at their point of contact. We had more resources available on D-Day. An offensive naturally would always try and have more resources because, as those of you who have been in command positions will know, there are standard equations for force depending upon the service involved and the time factor as to how many more you should have at the point of contact. But the key thing, as you yourself just said, is that the British fought well at El Alamein. In 1940 the Italians had far more troops but did not exactly cover themselves with either glory or success.

An RAHS Member:

If we were much better than we have been painted, did we still need Rosie the Riveter or could we have got by without that approach?

Lecturer:

We certainly needed Rosie the Riveter because we needed a lot of shipping. We needed enough shipping to give us the security so that at best the U-boats could achieve operational, but not strategic advantage. In other words, most of our shipping would still get across the Atlantic even though some were sunk. Our ability to handle U-boats increased quite significantly by '43 and it is now generally argued that our bombing accuracy had improved by '44. So we needed the shipping to be able to guarantee things if the U-boats became more successful. This is important because the basic strategic task was going to be landing in Occupied Europe.

Even if the Soviets could have won the war without us – which in fact they

couldn't – we could not rely on them and in any case we did not want the Soviets to be the only people occupying Western Europe. So we were going to need a mass of shipping. We had to bring over all the equipment to bomb Germany and all the equipment for amphibious operations, plus the supplies for Britain which could not feed itself..

The production of weaponry in itself does not lead to victory. After all, the country which invented the industrial revolution at the cutting edge of technology invaded another power in 1839 which was really still back in the Iron Age. Alas the Afghans hadn't read *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. They did not know they were supposed to lose and in 1842 only one person returned from Afghanistan. Of course, if you read the Flashman novels, that was Sir Harry Flashman. Conceptually there are many cases in which the side with less resources has won. Resources do not necessarily dictate the outcome.

James Gower:

Where would you place the Battle of the Bulge in your scenario. A lot of people say that they just ran out of resources.

Lecturer:

It is strategically very questionable. Hitler's notion was that the defeat of the British and American forces there, would lead to a collapse of will in Britain and America. There is absolutely no evidence of that. In 1944 the Germans have the new V weapons, the best planes – the ME263 jet fighters - and they are also getting really good submarines. But it doesn't matter, because they've got no way of using these as force multipliers sufficiently to enable them to dictate the result. Let's say they had killed another 10,000 Americans. What on earth is that going to do? The Americans were after all preparing for much higher casualty rates in the Pacific.

One of the great German problems is that Hitler has got this continual fantasy in place of strategy; the easiest way to follow this is in the Goebbels diaries, because Goebbels goes to talk to Hitler all the time. If it's not going to be the Battle of the Bulge, it's going to be the death of Roosevelt, which will change American policy. Or maybe Churchill is going to die and British policy will change. The reality was that in the American presidential election

of November 1944, the Republicans had not fought the election on, "Let's get out of this war," and the Democrat candidate Truman was saying, "Keep going, keep going." So the war would continue, regardless of who won the election. In the event Roosevelt was re-elected.

James Gower:

I was really aiming at the tactical level where you opened, where the Germans were saying, "We're excellent professional soldiers".

Lecturer:

On the first couple of days in the Bulge the Germans did extremely well. They were benefiting from attacking deliberately under cloud so that the Allies had no air cover. In addition the Allied intelligence was deeply flawed.

The Americans were fighting what they called a hundred division war. In fact they have fewer than a hundred divisions for all their fronts. A lot of the American units in France were with Patton's Third Army down in Lorraine and there had been a lot of fighting in Alsace. So it was really scratch units in the Ardennes. The Germans also had the advantage of surprise, and by withdrawing the Fifth and Sixth Panzer armies from the Eastern Front, they were able to push through and so they should have done.

The interesting thing is that it went wrong. One of the problems was that at the tactical level, they pushed forward instead of attacking the flanks - the hinges if you like. That was a really serious mistake, which, apart from anything else, made it harder for them logistically as that they were controlling less of the road network. But ultimately my view is what on earth were they going to do?

There is an argument that by the last year of the war the Germans were fighting on for no particular purpose. Without suggesting any comparison, because I don't wish to be offensive to any of our American friends, the interesting contrast is with the Confederacy. The Confederates had a pretty good strategy which was to cause enough damage to the Union to ensure that in the '64 Presidential election, which would also be for some of the congressional seats, the Republicans would lose (Lincoln is a Republican) and the Democrats would come through. George B McClellan, who is the Democratic candidate, wants peace with the south and his number two, Pendleton, is a

copper head. In other words, he's willing to see slavery continue, but actually McClellan was also prepared to cede slavery. Once Lincoln wins, the war is over in less than six months because the Confederates know there's no point in going on.

Now in WWII terms, once Operation BAGRATION and D-Day – or more particularly the Battle of Normandy – have taken place, there wasn't much point in the Germans fighting on. There was nothing left and in a sense their strategy had completely collapsed. They were no longer on a one-front war anymore, but on a two-front war. Allied air attacks really increased; half of all the bombs dropped on Germany were dropped in the last six months, which really drove home to the German public, 'Forget it, you've lost'.

If Hitler had kept going for much longer, Berlin would have been taken out with the atom bomb and that would probably have worked.

Mark Waring:

My question is on quality rather than quantity and about the myth that the British Army lacked aggression and were hesitant and only really attacked when they had overwhelming resources and particularly after the lessons of the 88mm gun and the Tiger tank in Normandy, would you say that was correct?

Lecturer:

John Buckley is the person to ask about this, apart from his book on 21st Army Group, he also wrote a book on tank conflict in Normandy.¹³

But from my point of view, the British followed, as did the Americans, a relatively systematic approach. Many of their better generals had had key operational experience in 1917 and 18 and in many senses they were operating in accordance with the successful techniques of that period. And remember, as in World War I, the Western Front was very different to the terrain on the Eastern Front. On the Eastern Front, you had less people spread across a much greater area and the density of the defences was much lower.

13 *Monty's Men: The British Army and the Liberation of Europe* by Prof John Buckley. Pub Yale 2013. ISBN: 9780300205343.

British Armour in the Normandy Campaign by Prof John Buckley Pub Cassels 2004. ISBN 0714653233.

Think about areas where the British army had to do a lot of nasty fighting, for example around the Reichswald Forest in the Rhineland in '45. You're talking about waterlogged terrain which is not too different from Flanders in 1917 and what you're doing is mounting a combination of artillery and infantry attacks. Tanks could only achieve so much in that sort of terrain.

Overall within the timespan, I think the Allies did well. They landed on June 6th and by April they were on the Elbe. I think that's pretty good going against a determined, vicious defence and in a really, really tough winter.

I hope I haven't shocked you too much.

I am not a very good typist, and emails from me tend to be in the form: "Yes," "No," "Great". But if anybody wants to correspond about this, that's fine. However first read the books. I don't want to repeat what I've already said today and I have only got so much time. But anyway, thank you very much and good luck and for those still in the military, there are many people in civil society that are very pro- military.

Chairman:

Thank you for a fascinating lecture which has given us a different perspective on World War II and the factors that influenced the outcome.

11

On History

An interview with Jeremy Black

by Dr. Zbigniew Janowski¹

June 1, 2020 Zbigniew Janowski



Z bigniew Janowski (ZJ): Allow me to begin with a short biographical note. Among your books are: *Military Strategy: A Global History*, *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History*, *Maps of War*,

¹ Dr. Zbigniew Janowski is author of several books on Descartes and a forthcoming book *Homo Americanus. The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy in America*. This interview was prepared for the Polish magazine *Arcana: Historia, Kultura, Politika* (ARCANA, Kraków, 1995-) and appeared in May on *The Postil Magazine* with permission, and will appear in *Arcana's* August issue. Republished here by kind courtesy of *Postil Magazine* and *Arcana*.

Naval Warfare: A Global History since 1860, Naval Power: A History of Warfare and the Sea from 1500 Onwards, Rethinking Military History, The British Abroad: The Grand Tour In The Eighteenth Century, A History of the World: From Prehistory to the 21st Century, The Age of Total War, 1860-1945, Geographies of an Imperial Power: The British World, 1688-1815, War and the World: Military Power and the Fate of Continents, 1450-2000, Imperial Legacies: The British Empire Around the World, English Nationalism: A Short History, The British Seaborne Empire.

I missed “a few books”—or, more precisely, I did not list the 80 other books you wrote! In your bio, I found that you have authored 100 books. That’s more than what Paul Johnson, Arnold Toynbee or Guizot wrote. It is more than most, even very well-educated people, will ever read, let alone by a single historian. Are you writing, thinking what the potential reader should know, or are you answering your own questions?

Jeremy Black (JB): As you suggest, I have written more history books than any other British writer. I do not count them, but I think there are about 140 single author books, as well as three co-authored and quite a few edited. I obviously have a compulsion, but there is also a determination to rewrite what I think is poorly covered, at the very least offering a different interpretation so that no one can pretend that there is only one view, which is a flaw of the zeitgeist approach.

ZJ: In his *The Idea of History*, Robin Collingwood, following Voltaire, says that the idea of “Philosophy of History” means “a critical or scientific history, a type of historical thinking in which the historian made up his mind for himself instead of repeating whatever stories he found in old books.”

The Positivists claimed that there are general laws governing the course of events. Thucydides, Joseph Flavius, Dio Cassius, Procopius of Caesarea, and others on the other hand, say that the task of history is to preserve great human deeds from falling into oblivion. Do you subscribe to any of the above “schools”?

JB: I do not think that there are general rules in the writing of history, as it depends on the complex interaction of cultural and temporal contexts, individual approaches, and the particular issues at stake in specific topics. For each book, I consider the task I have set and the audience I have in mind, and

I try to write and reason accordingly. The space available is also a key point. The analysis of documents can be scientific, but that of humans is necessarily more limited.

ZJ: So, let me follow up on your claim that there are no general rules in the writing of history. John Stuart Mill, who is hardly ever mentioned as a philosopher of history, claims that most of mankind has no history properly speaking. What he means by that is that history is more than chronology, and to turn chronology into history there must be an engine that drives it for history to develop. Otherwise we deal with static civilization, like China, which he uses as an example. Several thousand years and nothing, or not much. The same can be said about ancient Egypt, which Mill does not mention, but which falls under the same category of static civilizations.

If we look at, for example, sculptures, they seem to be the same for two thousand years. If we go to ancient Greece and compare the development of sculpture and vase design, from the white geometric style in 800-700 BC, to the Classical period, and the almost flamboyant, expressive, emotional Hellenistic style in 4th-century BC (Pergamon reliefs, for instance), we see fantastic “progress” or change in design and expression. Greece changed; China and Egypt did not.

Is Mill’s insight essentially correct? That is, to have history we need to inject the idea of progress into chronology?

JB: I see History as the Past, how we tell stories about the past. Neither in my view is inherently progressivist and I would argue separately that that is the conservative position; but then I am a committed conservative.

ZJ: Let me move to something you wrote about in *The British Seaborne Empire*. There you claim that in the middle of the 19th-century, Britain applied the new technology more successfully than other European powers, and its industrial production motivated the Empire to expand. However, this insight explains 19th-century expansion. What were the earlier motivating factors, and were they the same that made others seek to build empires?

JB: A quest for trade, a sense of destiny and a feeling of Christian providential is the same three for Portugal and Dutch.

ZJ: You mention what you call “gentlemanly capitalism,” which places emphasis not only on manufacturing of goods, but on finances, insurance etc.,

what we could call today infrastructure, which is connected with social values. Those values were propagated by the graduates of the British schools. Would you say that there were in fact two empires: one heavily industrial and the other “cultural,” which disseminated the British values (not necessarily intentionally), and that in doing so the British exported their value system to one fourth of the globe?

JB: I would agree entirely. To be effective an imperial system has to have an attractive ideology, else it relies on force and coercion which does not work in the long term as the continued free spirit of Poland shows.

ZJ: Here is a fragment from the description of your book, *English Nationalism: A Short History*: “Englishness is an idea, a consciousness and a proto-nationalism. There is no English state within the United Kingdom, no English passport, Parliament or currency, nor any immediate prospect of any.” Sir Roger Scruton in his *England: An Elegy* made what I believe to be a similar claim: England did not succeed in creating a nation, but, rather, Home for the English.

JB: That does not mean that England lacks an identity, although English nationalism, or at least a distinctive nationalism, has been partly forced upon the English by the development in the British Isles of strident nationalisms that have contested Britishness, and with much success.

So, what is happening to the United Kingdom, and, within that, to England? I look to the past in order to understand the historical identity of England, and what it means for English nationalism today, in a post-Brexit world. The extent to which English nationalism has a “deep history” is a matter of controversy, although he seeks to demonstrate that it exists, from ‘the Old English State’ onwards, predating the Norman invasion.

I also question whether the standard modern critique of politically partisan, or un-British, Englishness as “extreme” is merited? Indeed, is hostility to “England,” whatever that is supposed to mean, the principal driver of resurgent English nationalism?

The Brexit referendum of 2016 appeared to have cancelled out Scottish and other nationalisms as an issue, but, in practice, it made Englishness a topic of particular interest and urgency, as set out in this short history of its origins and evolution.

ZJ: What you said makes me wonder whether the reason for Asian civilizations not expanding or building empires lies in a very different character of Eastern religions. After all, around the same time, say 1500, Asia (China, Japan, India) was in some respects more advanced than Europe: Small continent, very divided, small kingdoms, principalities. Asia, viewed from above, appeared to be a better candidate to dominate the world than the West.

JB: You are absolutely correct. They were predominantly courtly and rural and hostile to mercantile interests.

ZJ: The British of 18th- and 19th-centuries did not study business, administration, finances, etc., the disciplines that are popular today. Yet, “reading” the classics or history, as you say of the UK, was fundamental in creating a frame of mind that was conducive in preparing a host of people to run the empire. What role did Classical education play in it?

JB: The Classical education that was dominant in England provided in the shape of Rome a model of imperial behaviour that was seductive in terms of British imperialism, but the mercantile order instead focused on experience-led understanding of opportunities.

ZJ: Since you invoked Poland, let me quote something that an Australian friend of mine wrote me recently: “I admire your energy, but cannot share in any optimism about the immediate future of the US or Western Europe – perhaps something from Central Europe, even Russia might be born – but I am with Kafka – yes there is hope but not for us. I am not trying to convince you – or anyone on this, I am just sharing what I see and feel about now and the future.”

Do you share my friend’s sentiment? I hear it often; the West—the US, Europe etc.—is lost; letting millions of immigrants who cannot assimilate was a mistake, the West abandoned its commitment to Tradition, history, values. Eastern European countries resisted and are in a better position to defend themselves.

JB: There is certainly a cultural crisis in the West, one linked to grave social issues; but the uncertainty of developments, the prime law of history, makes it impossible to predict the future.

ZJ: Does your claim about the rise of industrial production in 19th-centu-

ry, which made Britain look to expand the empire, apply to China today? The new Silk Road, etc. inscribes itself well in what you said in your book. Is the mechanism the same, similar?

JB: China today has parallels to Britain's pattern of growth, but is far more authoritarian.

ZJ: Let me move to another topic, but before I do, I would like to give you a few examples. In October 2017, Christ Church in Alexandria, VA, of which George Washington was a founding member and vestryman in 1773, pulled down memorial plaques honoring him and General Robert E. Lee. In a letter to the congregation, the church leaders stated that: "The plaques in our sanctuary make some in our presence feel unsafe or unwelcome. Some visitors and guests who worship with us choose not to return because they receive an unintended message from the prominent presence of the plaques."

In August 2017, the Los Angeles City Council voted 14-1 to designate the second Monday in October (Columbus Day) as "Indigenous Peoples Day." According to the critics of Columbus Day, we need to "dismantle a state-sponsored celebration of genocide of indigenous peoples." Some of the opponents of Columbus Day made their intentions clear by attaching a placard on the monument: "Christian Terrorism begins in 1492."

In June 2018, the board of American Library Association voted 12-0 to rename the Laura Ingall Wilder Award as the "Children's Literary Legacy Award." Wilder is a well-known American literary figure and author of books for children, including *Little House on the Prairie*, about European settlement in the Midwest. In a statement to rename the award, the Board wrote: "Wilder's legacy, as represented by her body of work, includes expressions of stereotypical attitudes inconsistent with ALSC's core values of inclusiveness, integrity and respect, and responsiveness."

What is happening in America today sounds, to me, very familiar. As a former denizen of the Socialist paradise, I have the *déjà vu* feeling. Monuments were torn down, awards were renamed, etc. How do you explain these stunning similarities? To me, and I do not have a better explanation, things come down to History, the understanding of its essence.

History is seen as progressive, has a logic of its own and destroys its past; it condemns itself, its infancy for being immoral and discriminatory. The ex-

amples I gave you are American, but similar problems can be derived from the UK. I remember a controversy over the monument of Cecil Rhodes (the founder of a very prestigious scholarship for American and Canadian students) at Oriel College, Oxford, except that Oxford did not give in to the activists' demands to remove it.

JB: I would prefer not to repeat what I covered in several books on the memorialisation of the past, which I commend to your attention, not least as they offer an account of historiography that is not limited to the narrow world of intellectuals. So, can I add a few contextual points? A facile and inaccurate approach is to argue that battles over identity reflect the failure of the Marxist narrative and the competing ideologies of the twentieth century.

I am less sanguine. In part, I see a continuation in a new iteration of anti-Western Cold War narratives, especially of the Maoist type; in part The Long March through the Institutions, in part a narcissistic preference for present day emotion and sentiment over continuity, reason, and an understanding of the fecklessness of much current commitment, and in part a brilliant way by self-important monochromatic thinkers to advance their careers through polemic; monochromatic referring to a failure to see a full spectrum of arguments and polemic chosen rather than rhetoric.

ZJ: On September 1st, 2018, the Editors of a prestigious British Magazine the *Economist*, published “A Manifesto” to “rekindle the spirit of [liberal] radicalism.”

In it, we read: “Liberalism made the modern world, but the modern world is turning against it. Europe and America are in the throes of a popular rebellion against liberal elites, who are seen as self-serving and unable, or unwilling to solve the problems of ordinary people... For the *Economist* this is profoundly worrying. We were created 175 years ago to campaign for liberalism—not the leftish progressivism of American university campuses or the rightish ‘ultra-liberalism’ conjured up by the French commentariat, but a universal commitment to individual dignity, open markets, limited government and a faith in human progress brought about by debate and reform.”

However sober the *Economist's* statement appears, it is reminiscent of past declarations by the Communists (in 1956, 1966, 1968, 1971, 1980). After

each crisis, they made their declarations to keep the faith in the health of communist ideology by blaming the former Party executive committee. The declarations found the classic expression in the slogan: “Socialism Yes, distortions No!”

Once again, as a historian, do you see analogy between Socialism and Liberalism?: “Liberalism Yes, distortions No!” Same problems, same explanations, same idea of blaming someone: the kulaks, the party members, the corrupt elites—but never the Idea, be it the Communist idea or Liberal idea.

JB: Liberalism, like Conservatism, is a mood as well as an ideology, and practices as well as precepts. Inherently, a Liberalism predicated on individual freedom had much to offer and there are contexts in the nineteenth century where Liberalism or at least Liberal causes were meritorious and remain attractive. Anti-slavery, opposition to censorship and support for religious freedom are prime instances. It is ironic to a degree but also a reflection of the ideological essence of the last century, that these ideas are now best advanced by Conservatives while the progressivist dimension of Liberalism has been transmogrified into an authoritarian statism that owes something to Socialism but is not restricted to it.

ZJ: Can there be a healthy conservatism in the US? As our friend Jonathan Clark argues, Americans have problems answering the question what should be conserved. The new country was founded as a rebellion against the Past, against the hierarchical order.

JB: The differing natures of ideological parameters are suggested by the contrast between The USA and Europe. In the former case, the competition has been between different conceptions of individualism with the ability to choose and change religious affiliation at will, a key form of individualism. Conservatism tends to be expressed in terms of hostility to government, hostility which indeed can have an anti-societal perspective and notably so if social norms are imposed. In Europe, notably Continental Europe, the understanding of society places less of an emphasis on the individual.

ZJ: We tend to see the PC movement in the US as an aberration, even insanity, and there is every reason to consider many of the claims made by the advocates of PC as insane. One can hear the call to dismantle “power structure” daily. Listening to the liberal rhetoric one often gets the feeling

that oppression is real, as real as it was in 18th c. However, from a broader historical perspective one can see what is happening as further unfolding of the principles which were at work in 18th-century America

JB: There is no correct format, that indeed being a characteristic of Conservatism, being more pluralistic than the doctrinaire nature of the Left. As a British Conservative, I seek a middle way between the two, which incidentally helps explain my support for leaving the European Union. I am wary of government but keen on society.

ZJ: Let's dwell for a moment on what you just said: As for the first part of your statement ("Conservatism tends to be expressed in terms of hostility to government"), the same thing can be said about Liberalism. You remember how German socialist, Ferdinand Lasalle, described the limited or Liberal government: *Nachtwächterstaat*—a night-watchman state, or, in the words of the British historian, Charles Townshend, as a "standard-bearer." If I remember correctly, the opponents of the liberal states called their supporters the "minarchists."

The sole duty of such a state was to prevent theft, enforce property laws, and provide security. This is not the reason why the Conservatives are hostile to government; they, as you said, are afraid of the government because it can be an instrument of the imposition of laws and regulations which are fundamentally hostile to the "natural order of things." Can one say, then, that both parties differ with respect to what they see the function or role of the state should be, or why the state is there in the first place.

JB: The interaction, indeed melding of traditional conservatism and liberalism, has varied greatly and will continue to do so. In large part, this reflects contingent circumstances and the way in which they are debated and recalled, in short, the weight of history, but there is commonality of the issues posed by democracy and democratisation, as well as the particular inroads and challenges of Communism, Socialism, and Fascism. To a degree, these developments made classic liberalism redundant unless in a conservative context.

ZJ: With respect to how Liberals and Conservatives perceive the role of the State, can one say that the difference between the two lies in that the Liberals use the state to impose abstract social norms, whereas the Conservatives see the state as a guardian of the inherited order of the Past. Edmund Burke saw

it when he talked about the “Empire of Reason,” “cold hearts.” This way of thinking underlies the idea of social engineering, that is, finding a method of molding reality into what the abstract reason, unrestrained by tradition, history, the Past, wants it to be. Thus, the Past—national history, national identity—is no longer something worth preserving, but a piece of clay in the hands of “experts” who know what social and political life should be like.

JB: You have expressed that very well. Macron is a liberal in these terms.

ZJ: Going off of what you just said. (In large part, this reflects contingent circumstances and the way in which they are debated and recalled, in short, the weight of history, but there is commonality of the issues posed by democracy and democratisation, as well as the particular inroads and challenges of Communism, Socialism, and Fascism. To a degree, these developments made classic liberalism redundant unless in a conservative context).

This raises a few interesting points, which I would like to phrase in the following way: First, redundancy. The appearance of the Socialist idea made Liberalism, or some of its propositions, redundant or even obsolete because socialism (not in the Stalinist version but in socialist-democratic version) could be said to have proposed them all, or made them look even better. Second, your redundancy thesis against the Conservative background also helps to explain why Liberalism appeared to be benign and made Conservatism look like a proposition which does not have much to offer.

For as long as Communism was threatening, Liberalism appeared to be attractive because it fought for individual liberties against its collectivist rival. With the collapse of Communism, Liberalism lost its urgency to defend the individual against the democratic collective, which de Tocqueville feared so much. Would you agree?

JB: I would agree completely, and would add that the challenge from liberalism has become more serious because of the ability of left liberals to control the mechanisms of the steadily larger public sector. This provides a different ethos for statism to that of Communism, but it is statism nonetheless.

ZJ: I want to quote something to you. It surprised to me how few people noticed the similarity between Marxist and Liberal understanding of history. Here is the first passage: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and

serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations..”

And here is another passage: “The entire history of social improvement has been a series of transitions, by which one custom or institution after another, from being a supposed primary necessity of social existence, has passed into the rank of a universally stigmatised injustice and tyranny. So it has been with the distinctions of slaves and freemen, nobles and serfs, patricians and plebeians; and so it will be, and in part already is, with the aristocracies of colour, race, and sex.”

The second passage comes from the very end of Mill’s *Utilitarianism*. Marx talked about laws of historical development; Mill in his earliest writings – “Perfectibility,” “Civilization,” “The Spirit of the Age” – talks about “tendencies” (i.e., the spirit).

What is the goal of History to Marx and Mill? Essentially an egalitarian world, a world without polarizing impulses which divide people, and which create hierarchy. History, as it unfolds itself, eliminates hierarchy and leaves “no one behind,” as we say in America.

First, how does such a proposition of a non-hierarchical order of things sound to an eminent historian like yourself? Second, given the “equality” of results—that is, the fact that liberalism is turning into soft totalitarianism—should one see the progressive vision of history as the source of oppressiveness of the two socio-political systems?

JB: To be succinct, equality of outcome, as an impossible result, can only be the objective of the misguided and/or totalitarian. That encompasses liberalism and Marxism, both of which are based on the flawed proposition that mankind must be made equal, and that all else is a false reaction and/or consciousness. Thus, the false consciousness that the Left propounds is in fact its condition.

ZJ: A typical liberal response to your answer about equality of outcome is: we want equality of opportunity. When I hear it, I tell my students: “do farmers in all places have the same opportunity, the same fertile soil and good climate? The same goes for fishermen, and so on.” My second response is: “consider your situation: you have equal opportunity in my class to learn from me; do all of you take the advantage of it? The majority of you did not even do the reading for today.” Some of them seem to understand what I am saying; others resist it. How do you respond to it?

JB: I agree entirely with your observations about teaching. Moreover, the pursuit of equality only creates more inequalities, not only in the determination of an alleged problem, but also in the measures pursued by means of implementation and with reference to the likely outcomes. As a consequence, we are in the world of fleas on fleas.

More subtly, the quest to end inequality inevitably destabilises the precarious equality between state and society, and between government and the individual.

ZJ: Let me put forth a suggestion here, and please do not hesitate to correct me if I am wrong. England is not exactly a home of Liberalism. True, we can talk about the project of broadening the franchise through the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867, and 1884–85. But they can be said to be fundamentally democratic claims. Yet Mill’s Liberalism, as a panoramic, all-embracing vision in the context of 19th century English political thought, occupies a rather exceptional place. Mill’s ideology, because that is what his system is, inscribes itself better in the Continental way of thinking.

Could one say that Liberalism came to England through the back door, through France? I do not mean by that a commonsensical claim, which says that we all are influenced by ideas which come from different geographical places. But that Mill created a political philosophy that had little chance of being created out of “natural” English soil? One could literally point with a finger to places in his *On Liberty* which Mill “borrowed” from Guizot, in whose *General History of Civilization in Europe* he found a progressive scheme of history, as much as he borrowed from Wilhelm von Humboldt and Alexis de Tocqueville.

JB: English political thought and practice are traditionally accretional,

with the ad hoc quality owing much both to the specific nature of case law and to its use in a parliamentary context on a contingent basis arising from particular challenges. As a result, Mill's systematic prospectus prefigured the challenge of the later stages of the EU in providing an account that left no real role for the granulated character of English life and institutions: An excess of philosophical idealism cut across the organic development of the nation.

ZJ: You call yourself conservative. Can you explain what it means to you today?

JB: Change in the form of adaptation is an obvious necessity of the human species, but a conservative knows that in itself change is not a moral good, and that change ought to be referential to the past and reverential of it. The social and psychological benefit of continuity is as one with an ideological commitment to the value and values of the past. That is not reaction, but a key element of the trust between the generations that is a necessity for us as individuals and as part of a broader group.

ZJ: You wrote 140 books, including the history of the world, which means you know more history than any single individual on the planet. Historians by the very nature of their profession should care about the Past. Many of your colleagues seem to use history to invalidate Tradition, Culture, the Past—History. How do you explain their attitude? Is it the hatred of oneself—mankind—as Herr Freud would have it? But to be serious: could we say that they are unhappy about who we, as human beings, are?

JB: I fear we are looking here at a profession which is disproportionately attached to identity politics of a peculiarly destructive form, in large part because of a combination of facile Post-Modernism with doctrinaire Socialism. Existing systems are rubbished in terms of an alleged false consciousness.

ZJ: The Walters Museum in Baltimore, where I live, announced (proudly) that this year they will not purchase any pieces of European art; only the art by minorities. They are looking for funds to buy art created by “minority” cultures. Decisions like that could be considered insane, but they are made by people in charge of serious cultural institutions.

Looking from a broad historical perspective, one could say, there is nothing surprising in it; the Americans are repudiating, and disposing of, the Past, they continue the 1776 Rebellion. In the middle 1980s they started repudi-

ating education by doing away of what used to be called in the US Western Civilization courses, or Great Books programs; 35 years later we see the intellectual devastation not just in the educational realm but public realm. American students do not know anything. Compare them to students from Kenya, Nigeria, Nepal, Pakistan, India and other places...

Once again, the comparison with Communism comes to mind. They too, were selling "the bourgeois" art in the 1930s. American museums are full of the paintings the Hermitage sold, including a great Poussin in Philadelphia.

JB: Yes, see also the sales by the Newark Museum. The destruction of a great heritage is serving fashionable interests deploying an anti-colonial agenda, so-called, in order to justify their sectional and partisan political agenda. It has no intellectual purpose, but is a deliberately iconoclastic movement which delights in disorientating culture and society

ZJ: Here is a sentence from a recent email by my former (female) student: "I had told you once: We are all on the same conveyor belt headed to the slaughterhouse, just some are further down than others. I'm just trying to save my soul."

First, what I see in her email is a sense of desperation—the same sense of desperation that people under communism felt—the Roller of History will crush us, thus we need to "adjust our thinking to the official views." It explains why so many intellectuals compromised, sold themselves, their intellect, talent, integrity... to the ideological devil. More importantly, my student's reaction is emblematic of how the young and thoughtful American feels.

I used quotations from Marx and Mill to make a point. What is the goal of History to them? An egalitarian world, a world without polarizing impulses which divide people, and which create hierarchy. History eliminates hierarchy and leaves "no one behind," as we say in America.

JB: The presentation of history as uni-totalitarian is morally flawed and empirically wrong. It is a present, not conceit that seeks to extol a particular perception at the expense of the complexity of the past and the role of free will and choice, both moral and otherwise. The idea of determinism underlies such teleological visions, but they empty life of choice and therefore moral compass.

ZJ: Thank you, Professor Black.

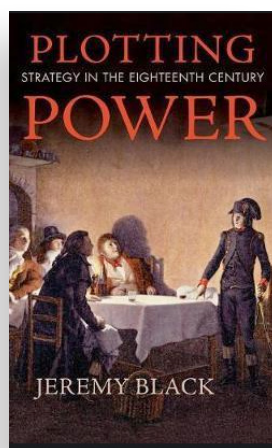
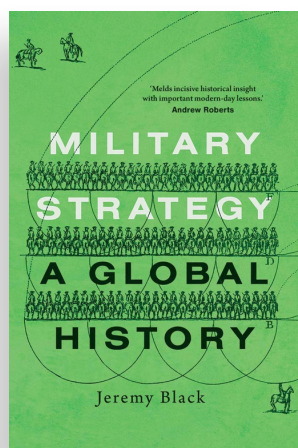
Jeremy BLACK

Military Strategy. A Global History,

Yale U. P., 2020, 420 pp.

Plotting Power. Strategy in the Eighteenth Century,

Indiana U. P., 2017, 320 pp.



With *Military Strategy: A Global History*, Jeremy Black, one of the most original contemporary military historians (and certainly the most productive¹), extends the “global military history” of the eighteenth century that he traced in 2017 with *Plotting Power*² to the last four centuries. ‘Global’³ history, a qualifier that recurs in numerous Black’s

1 See the list of over 170 volumes published from 1985 to 2020 (on average six per year), already included a couple scheduled for 2021, online at the jeremyblackhistorian website (wordpress)

2 J. BLACK, *Plotting Power: Strategy in the Eighteenth Century*, Indiana U. P., 2017, 320 pp.

3 J. BLACK, «Postscript: Strategy and Military History», in Id., *Plotting Power: cit.*, pp. 279-286; Id *Introduction to Global Military History: 1775 to the Present Day*, 2012; Id., *Rethinking Military History*. Routledge, 2004. The adjective is also used by *Global War Studies*, *The Journal for the Study of Warfare and Weapons 1919-1945*, yearly edited since 2003 almost up to 2015 by Pacific War Study Group (Carlsbad Calif.).

books, not only means ‘extended to the whole world’, but also to all forms of war; and therefore this implies a comparative, diachronic, transnational and not “state-centric” nor “Western-centric” history of the war.

Both volumes, and especially the second, however, require, in my opinion, a preliminary epistemological warning. The question is that as the narrative plot and conceptual frame of this “global military history” the author has chosen “strategy”, a word already in itself ‘chameleon’ and today also inflated and abused⁴. While the adjective “military” only says that we want to talk about war rather than business, because the object of the book is not theory, but practice, not the ‘art’ (*téchne, officium*) of the general, but the interaction or rather the ‘interweaving’ of opposing aims, plans and frictions.

In short, this book is a treasure chest that needs a key, and I looked for it in the title - intriguing, ambiguous - of the previous book. What does *Plotting Power* mean? The author does not explain it in the text, and the title could be an editorial choice. The icon on the cover (*Le souper de Beaucaire*, by Jean Lecomte de Nouÿ) suggests ‘the power of knowing how to plot’; perhaps a type of ‘war capacity’ (Power) such as Sea, Air, Nuclear, Soft Power? But ‘plot power’ also occurs in game theory (machination), narratology (plot) and engineering (tracing power). And the latter seems to me to be the most coherent meaning with Black’s historiographical project: ‘tracing’, or ‘inventing’ the ‘ability to make war’ wherever it really manifested itself - first in the ‘global’ eighteenth century, and then over the past four centuries.

A ‘strategic’ story warns the reader not to expect a ‘social’ history of the war phenomenon in the late modern and contemporary age. This does not mean that this is a mere comparative history of ‘art’, of ‘conduct’, of ‘national styles’, of the ‘Asian way’ of waging war; not even of the decision-making process, of the del *Kabinettskrieg zum Volkskrieg*⁵, del *Command in War*⁶,

4 As examples of the inflation of the term BLACK mentions the expressions “strategic communication” and “polemical strategy” (*Introduction*, pp. 12-13).

5 Helmuth VON MOLTKE, *vom Kabinettskrieg zum Volkskrieg: Ein Werkauswahl*, ed. Stig FOSTER, Bonn and Berlin, 1992. Frank GÖSE, «Der Kabinettskrieg», in Dietrich BEYRAU et al. (Hrsg.), *Formen des Krieges, von der Antike bis zum Gegenwart*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2007, pp. 121-147. J. BLACK, *A History of Diplomacy*, 2010.

6 Martin VAN CREVELD, *Command in War*, Harvard U. P., 1985.

della *Transformation of War*⁷, della *Culture of War*⁸. A ‘strategic’ history is rather a critical history of the ‘decision’ as a continuous interaction between actors (state and non-state) and levels (politics, strategy, tactics and their declinations) that the West erroneously classifies in hierarchical order; but above all, a critical history of the long-term ‘outcome’ of conflicts, where ‘victory’ and ‘defeat’ are not mutually ‘zero-sum’.

Having already covered it extensively in *Plotting Power*⁹, in *Military Strategy* Black barely mentions the genesis (moreover well-known) of the term ‘strategy’¹⁰ and hints at the various and conflicting theoretical definitions only to get rid of the constraint of giving it its own and to demonstrate how many problems are actually hidden in the search for what he calls (with a term borrowed from physics) a “unified theory” of strategy¹¹. In his vision, the Western idea of the art of war is mainly evolutionary – an idea which he calls “developmental fashion, a fashion that apparently links past to present”, but also “Teleological approaches”¹², “Whig interpretation”¹³ or “Modernization theory”¹⁴ - responsible for having created many “illusions” about the possibility of finding a “theoretical basis” for understanding war. The birth of ‘strategy’ at sunset of the ancient regime, is seen at the same time as the fruit of the Enlightenment and necessary tool of an increased global projection of the great powers¹⁵.

According to Black, the intellectual appeal that “strategic thinkers” (as Lloyd, Clausewitz, Jomini, Mahan, Douhet, Fuller and Liddell Hart) exerts on “academics”, contributes to the illusion. But “In practice, such thinkers might have been largely irrelevant, or relevant only in so far as they captured, and

7 Martin VAN CREVELD, *The Transformation of War*, Free Press, 1991.

8 Martin VAN CREVELD, *The Culture of War*, Presidio Press, 2008. J. Black, *War and the Cultural Turn*, 2012. J. BLACK, *War and the Cultural Turn*, 2012.

9 J. BLACK, *Plotting Power*, Chapter 4 *The Flow of Ideas*, pp. 118-141.

10 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy*, *Introduction*, pp. 27-28.

11 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy*, *Introduction*, p. 18.

12 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy*, *Conclusions*, p. 233.

13 J. BLACK, «Military History and the Whig Interpretation. *In memoriam* Dennis Showalter», *Nuova Antologia Militare*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 1, February 2020, pp. 3-26.

14 J. BLACK, «Modernisation Theory and (some of) conceptual flaws of the Early-Modern Military Revolution», *Nuova Antologia Militare*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 3, June 2020, pp. 3 ss.

15 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy*, *Introduction*, p. 27.

focused, general nostrums and current orthodoxies, and therefore served in some way to validate them”. Chinese military treaties, which until the eighteenth century were more conspicuous than European, do not seem to have ever influenced the Chinese style of war and it is said that the warrior emperor Kang-xi (r. 1662-1723) would have judged “useless” military classics¹⁶. [Here, in my opinion, the polemic over the practical irrelevance of strategic thinking has gone a little beyond measure, because it cannot be denied that it is part of the “strategic culture” and contributes not only to the education of leaders and to the codification of practice, but also, and above all, to critical military history, which does not consist only of findings, but of lessons learned and general interpretations too].

Anyway, the evolutionary vision of the art of war was abruptly contradicted by the catastrophic Western management of the post-cold war (not only Trump, but also his three predecessors aroused the deep state’s “anxieties” and French and British ‘humanitarian’ interventions have also been subject to harsh parliamentary complaints)¹⁷, so as to generate in the West a “crisis of trust” and “the feeling that strategy is somehow a lost art”. The history of the war, however, shows that “strategy is not a document, but an act (practice)”, rather it is “essentially the rationalization, immediate or subsequent, of an event-based act”, a “path, more than a plan”.

Therefore strategy cannot be truly understood if it is not placed in a specific “cultural context” or “strategic culture”¹⁸, the set of “general beliefs, attitudes and behavior patterns”, not only of nations, but also of individual leaders as well as the infra and supranational subjects that contribute to decision-making [taking into account that for states whose manifest destiny is necessarily to be someone’s satellites (such as Italy, even and even more after her political unity¹⁹), the exercise of strategic sovereignty is resolved in the choice of field, that is, in a typical contract for adhesion in which no claus-

16 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy, Introduction*, pp. 17-18.

17 J. BLACK recalls the unanimous judgment expressed on October 18, 2010 by a House of Commons Committee that in Iraq the British government had “lost the ability to think strategically”, and was acting with “short-termism”, dominated by events (*Military Strategy, Conclusions*, p. 228).

18 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy, Introduction*, pp. 14-15 e 29.

19 V. ILARI, «L’Italia come espressione geografica», *Gnosis* (being published).

es are given to negotiate]. The concept of “strategic culture”, originated in American Sovietology, from George Kennan (1946) to Jack Snyder (1977) and spread after 2006 starting from a Sondhaus’ study, is central to the work we are examining, and Black it prefers to “grand strategy”, considered a paradoxical cast by Guibert’s “grande tactique”: that Black considers, on turn, an anticipation of Georgij Samoilovič Isserson’s “Оперативное искусство” (operational art). But the concept of strategic culture is intrinsically sociological, and the historical study of a specific strategic culture implies knowing how to grasp, for example, the “connotative generational experiences” or the specific socio-cultural limits of rationality (“bounded rationality”, a concept that Black borrows from Herbert Simon).

Naturally the theory - codified during the last two centuries in national principles and doctrines and in the “western way of thinking about war” - is continuously kept in mind in the development of the book, but only as a conditioning factor and often also a cause of fatal misunderstandings of the opponent and of the “Nature” of war²⁰. This idiosyncrasy for systematics, this anarchic but fruitful conception of history as “a forest without paths”²¹ can confuse the reader, and in particular the specialist, also because the innovative use of ‘strategy’ as plot, frame, path, thread, behaviour, culture is exposed a little at a time, and the method must to be laboriously deduced, with a strong possibility of misunderstanding, from a text that proceeds in a flood way, gradually depositing elements and associations of ideas. What is further complicated by the understatement of presenting the book as a mere set of “case studies”, while it is instead a fifth essentia of the endless production of Black, which only very few are able to fully dominate.

As he had already done with regard to ‘geopolitics’²², even for ‘strategy’, Black effectively defends the use *ante litteram* of a modern word to ‘target’ issues, perceptions and practices of previous or culturally foreign times that “did (or do) philosophy without knowing it”, like Molière’s *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. The strategic behaviors are innate: Black mentions Sparta, Athens,

20 On the Iraq Fiasco, J. BLACK, *Military Strategy, Introduction*, p. 25.

21 ἀμέθοδος ὕλη [Sesto Empirico, *Adversus Mathematicos*, I, 266]. Santo MAZZARINO, *Il Pensiero storico classico*, Bari, Laterza, 1983, III, p. 376.

22 J. BLACK, *Geopolitics and the Quest for Dominance*, Bloomington, Indiana U. P., 2015. ID., *Geopolitics*, London, Social Affair Unit, 2009.

Rome, Byzantium, the Crusades, the Reconquista, the Mongols, and the Authors who studied them with the lens of the grand strategy²³. Perhaps this defense is still needed, if two generations ago most academics found bizarre the Edward Luttwak's *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* and even today it remains problematic to attribute to political elites of the past "a vision they never had and in language they would not have used"²⁴. But that's not the problem: without anachronisms there would be no historiography. The risk is instead that anachronism obliterates what we can learn by reconstructing the genesis of a concept and its diffusion (with shifts in meaning), or by analyzing why and what absences and / or 'equivalents' we can find in other eras or cultures²⁵.

Rather than the Enlightenment or a larger range of power projection, it seems to me that the luck of the term 'strategy' coined by Joly de Maizeroy depended on being a convenient abbreviation of the concept of 'art of war', ie the *Liturgy / officium* of the "perfect captain general". A terminological change, therefore, rather than a true conceptual innovation, as indeed the Princeton editors of *Makers of Modern Strategy* saw in 1942, placing Machiavelli at the top of the list. It is in fact then, at the beginning of the four centuries examined by Black, and not of the last two, that in the West begins - in parallel with the birth of the military guilds - the de-politicization and professionalization of the knowledge of war, confused in a reductive way with the technique of production and use of the standing armed force, ignoring the Caesarian concept of *ratio vincendi* and abandoning the seventeenth-century concept of *administratio belli*²⁶.

Clausewitz - who also uses the term already in the *Strategie* of 1804²⁷ - does not know what to do with it²⁸; first of all because his scheme is actually

23 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy, Introduction*, pp. 18-23.

24 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy, Introduction*, p. 15, about John P. LE DONNE, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (New York, 2004), pp. vii-viii.

25 Beatrice HEUSER, *Strategy Before Clausewitz: Linking Warfare and Statecraft, 1400-1830*, Routledge, 2017.

26 V. ILARI, «L'utilità e il danno della strategia per la guerra» (2012), in Id., *Clausewitz in Italia e altri scritti di storia militare*, Canterano, Aracne, 2019, pp. 181-198.

27 C. von CLAUSEWITZ, *Strategie, aus den Jahre 1804, mit Zusätzen von 1808 und 1809*, Eberhard KESSEL (Hrsg.), Hamburg, Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1937.

28 Martin KORNBERGER, «Clausewitz: on Strategy», *Business History*, Vol. 55, No. 7, pp.

binary (*Ziel / Zweck*) and therefore Clausewitz's 'strategy' is to 'politics' and 'tactics' like the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son; but above all because *Vom Kriege* investigates the structure of war and not the "Methodismus" (similarly the Machiavellian conception of war should not be sought in the *Arte*, but in the *Principe*).

Even Black, however, considers the progressive militarization and professionalization of the "strategic culture" to be pernicious, which, with the birth of the permanent staffs and the schools of war, has created a latent conflict of attributions between the military and politicians ("ownership of strategy"²⁹). "Setting the strategy as an area of rivalry between military and politicians helps to blame politicians for military failures"; professionalization creates a corporation and does not tolerate leaders, as the cases of McArthur and Hitler demonstrate; the use of quantitative methods and computational tools encourages "misleading teleological approaches". However, the growing American reception, since the 1980s, of the Soviet concept of operational art, can be beneficial if it releases the "strategy" [*rectius*, in my opinion, the "knowledge of war"] from the military, returning it to politics³⁰.

The criteria set out in chapters 1 and 13 (introduction and conclusion) guide the identification of the behavioral strategy in the eleven historical contexts to which chapters 2-12 are dedicated. The starting point is, of course, the long European eighteenth century, from the peace of Westphalia to the Revolutions, focused on the dynastic system, a factor of moderation and innovation in international relations and in the law of nations, but also a propensity for war both to restore the balance than to acquire or maintain prestige. The martial spirit is also required for the British elite, despite the nation's ethos being mercantile (the same happens today in the United States). The pre-revolutionary security system, both internal and external, has been based for almost a century and a half on marriage alliances and permanent forces, the latter made possible by the end of civil and religious wars and by the loyalty of the aristocracy to the sovereign, but limited by the scarcity of economic

1058-1073. Id. e Anders ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, «Reading Clausewitz, reimagining the practice of strategy», *Strategic Organization*, June, 2019.

29 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy, Introduction*, p. 25.

30 BLACK, *Military Strategy, Conclusion*, p. 231.

and financial resources and by non-decisive technological-military progress. Operations, at sea as well on land, remain heavily conditioned by climate, season and weather conditions; preserving the forces by living in the country and avoiding the battle was a priority, and the generals tried to outflank the enemy to dislodge him from their bases. But, contrary to the myth of the *guerres en dentelle*, there was a tolerance to losses infinitely higher than that of our era, hedonistic and individualistic. The ‘Periclean’ strategy of Frederick II of Prussia aimed to avert the “overstretching”, that was fatal to Charles XII. Lloyd, Clausewitz’s precursor in recognizing the political nature of the war and the importance of the moral factor, is the only author worthy of mention, among an extraordinary flowering - promoted by social prestige and national pride - of military treaties, memoirs and biographies of generals and stories of wars, campaigns and regiments. War itself is not yet thought of, except in moral and legal terms.

The third chapter examines the “strategy of the continental empires” (China, Turkey, Russia, Austria, France), that is, the enemies of Great Britain, to whom the fourth chapter is dedicated. The British style, on which Liddell Hart will then coin the formula of the “indirect approach”, consists in detaching naval teams in the Mediterranean, but also in the Baltic, Antilles and North America, conducting the economic war with the privateers and the distance blockade (even if prohibited by Utrecht’s law), support insurrections in the enemy’s rear, finance the war effort of indigenous and continental allies and limit “redcoats on ground” as much as possible. The conduct of the operations is largely decentralized to the commanders in the field, while the cabinet oscillates on the relative priority of the two fronts - Europe and North America - which characterize much of the “second Hundred Years War” (1690-1815). Unlike the continental and absolutist states, in Great Britain and in the United Provinces, maritime and liberal states characterized by a strong merchant class, foreign policy is discussed in parliament and on newspapers.

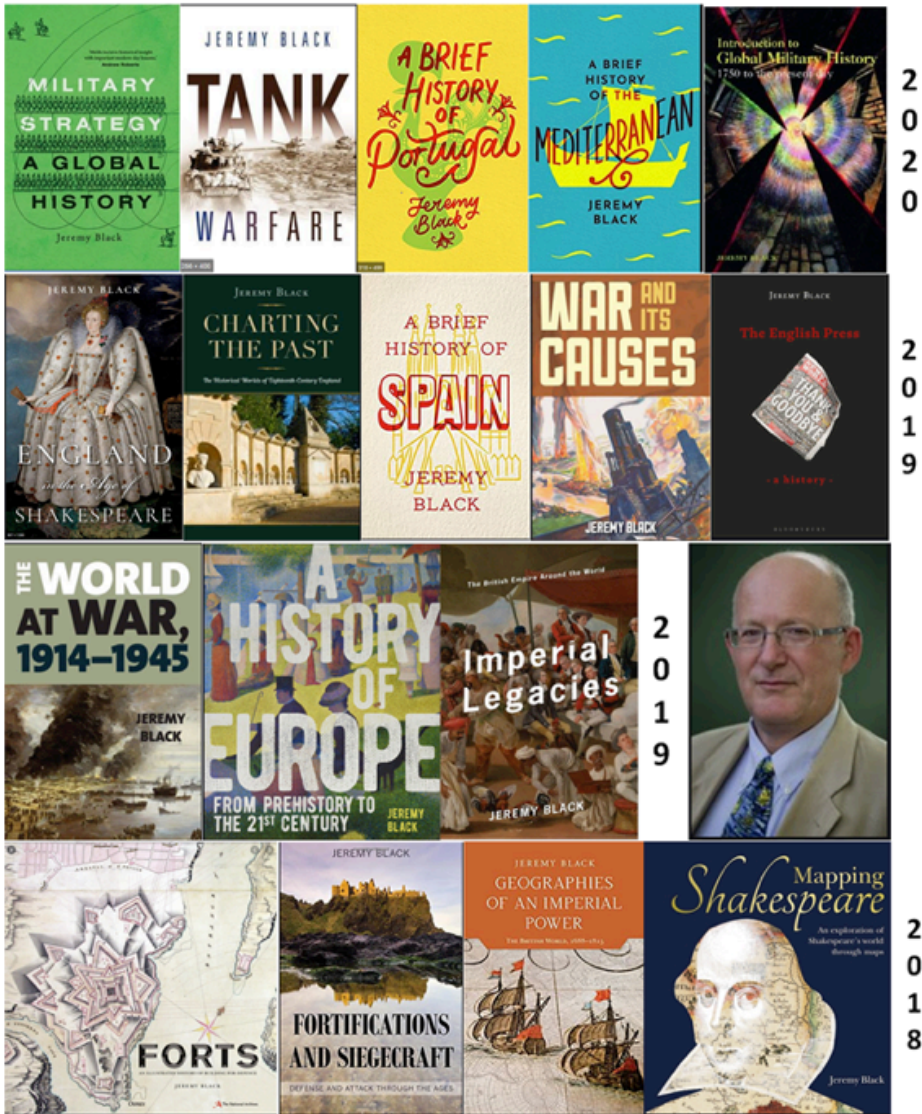
The “rise of republican strategies” – the American free to invent a post-modern state, the French (as well as the Soviet) forced to inherit the contradictions of a “modern” state that became “ancient” in three centuries – occupies chapter 5, together with an acute analysis of the British counter-insurgency, which went from an initial emphasis on pacification, to supporting the civil war between loyalists and rebels and the defense of the southern colonies from

French aims. In America, the republican aristocracy chooses isolation, France responds to the coalition of despots with the levée en masse and the export of the revolution. Chapter 6, on the Napoleonic wars, opens with an illuminating comparison between the global vision of Wellington and the regional vision of Clausewitz, to underline the failure of both Napoleonic strategies, the indirect attack on India and the continental blockade, and the decisive success of the economic war waged by Great Britain. Chapters 7 and 8 reflect the different nineteenth century of the two parallel worlds, America and Europe, the four remaining world wars, the cold war and the aftermath. The conclusion is that “strategies change, while strategic action does not.” “Historians address the past; but strategists plan for the future, albeit while trying to draw on the ‘lessons’ of the past”³¹.

Finally, it is intriguing that the book ends³² with an excursus [or an antiphon for the EU pro-Russian wing?] on the posthumous collapse of the policy of Vergennes, French foreign minister almost to the threshold of the Revolution, which, although alarmed by Russian and Austrian expansionism and from the first partition of Poland, he maintained an attitude of appeasement towards the Northern Powers, considering them necessary, together with the Bourbon Family Pact, as a deterrent towards Great Britain (and in fact the armed neutrality promoted by Catherine II was not less decisive than the direct French intervention in favor of the Thirteen Rebel Colonies).

31 J. BLACK, *Military Strategy*, Chapter 12, p. 212.

32 J. BLACK, *Military History, Conclusions*, pp. 238-239.



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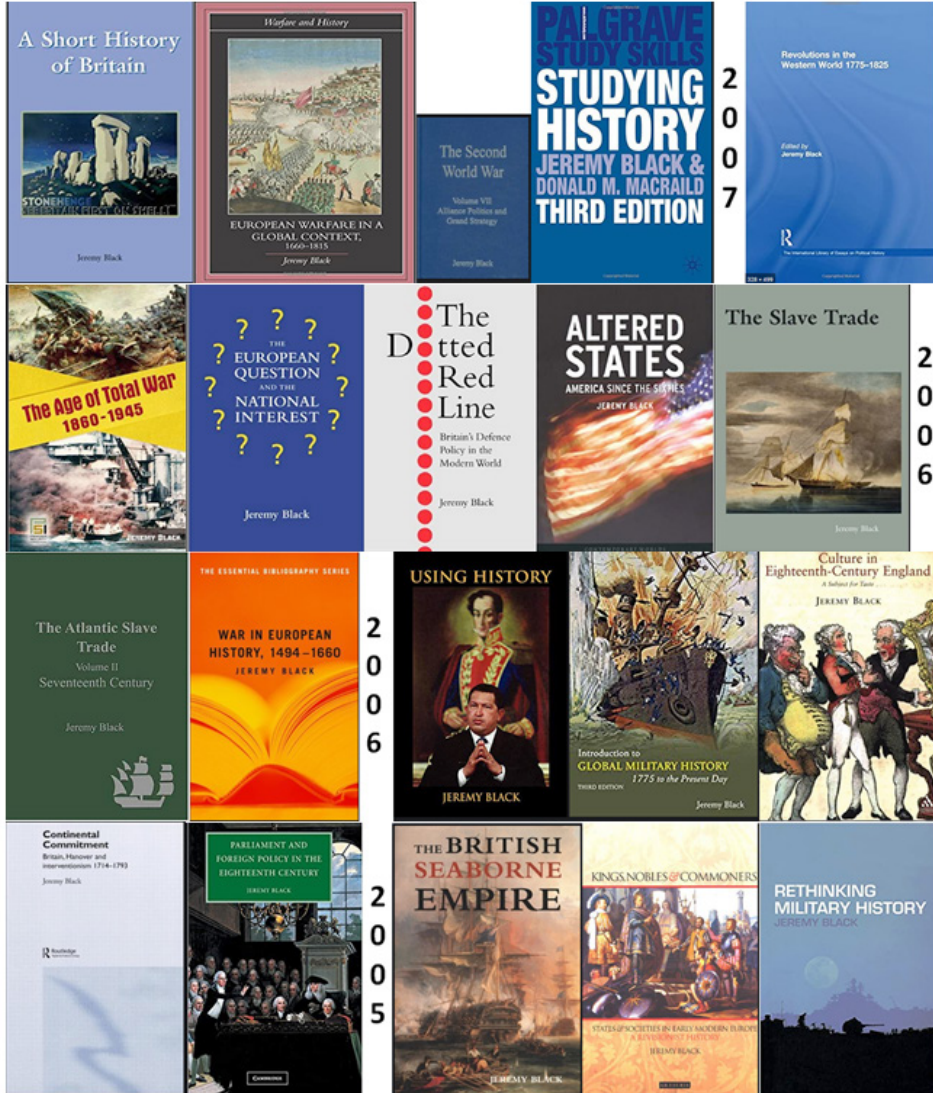
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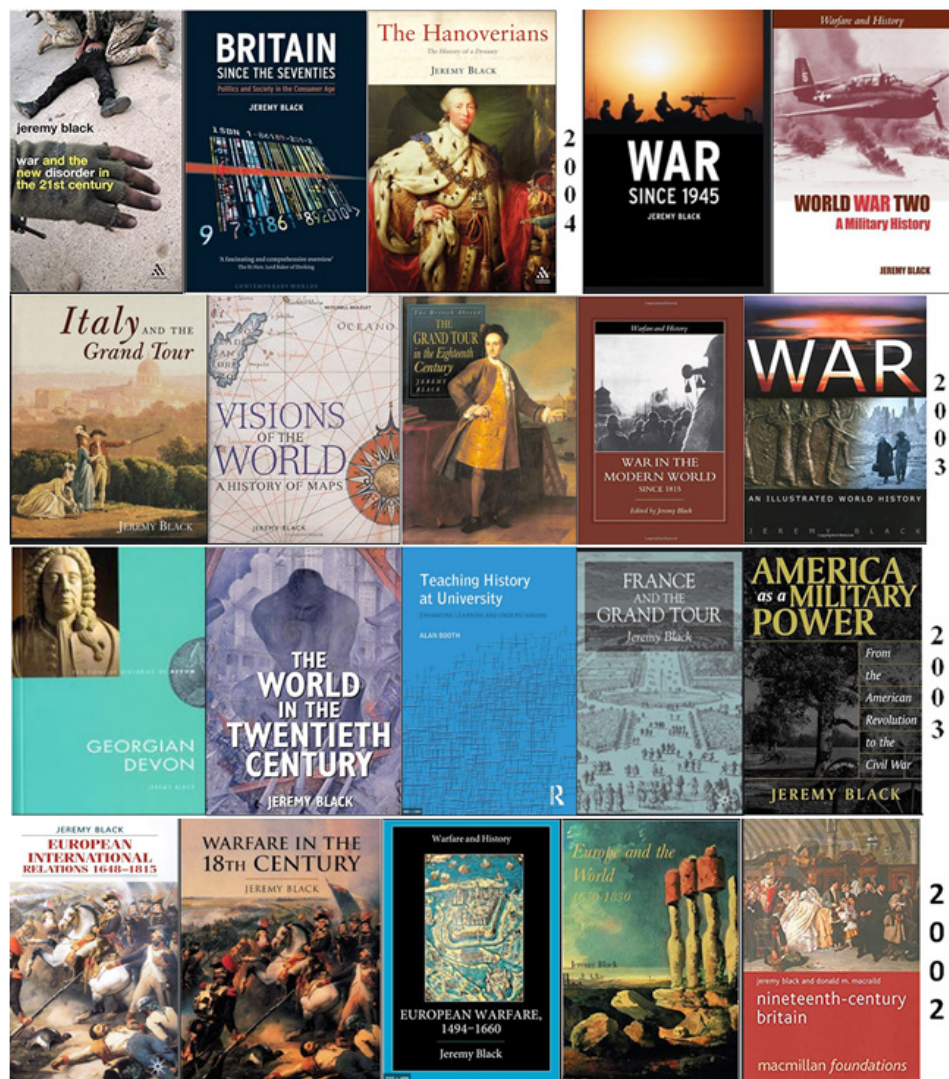
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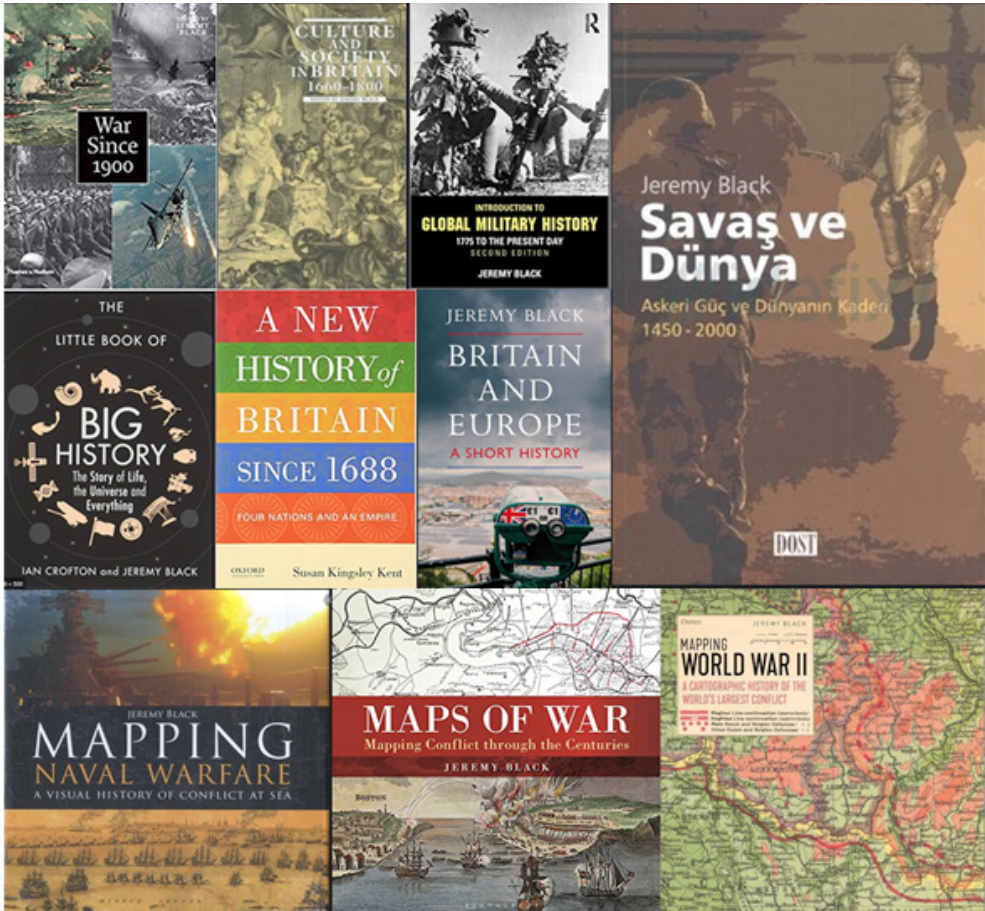


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