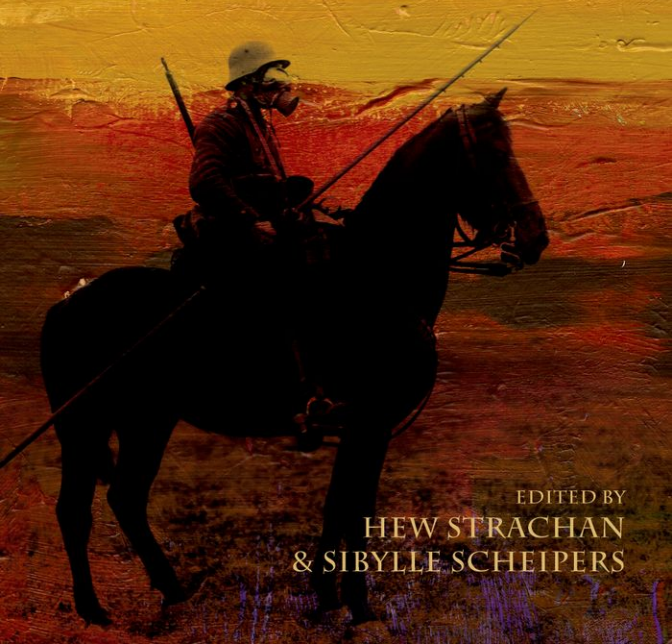


OXFORD

# the Changing Character of War



EDITED BY  
HEW STRACHAN  
& SIBYLLE SCHEIPEERS

# THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF WAR



The Changing Character of War Programme is an inter-disciplinary research group located at the University of Oxford, and was funded by the Leverhulme Trust between 2003 and 2009.

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CHARACTER OF WAR

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# Introduction

## The Changing Character of War

*Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers*

In 2003, the Leverhulme Trust invited universities in the United Kingdom to compete for a research grant to run a five-year programme on the Changing Character of War. Oxford won it. The primary debt owed by the editors and contributors to this volume is therefore to the Leverhulme Trustees. *The Changing Character of War* is our attempt to provide a summary of the results produced as a consequence of their generous support of the study of war in the university.

Oxford established its chair in what was then called military history, and since 1946 has been called the history of war, in 1909. A century ago, the Faculty of Modern History fulfilled some of the functions which today would be undertaken by a department of politics or—more exactly—of public policy. The first professor of military history, Spenser Wilkinson, certainly embraced contemporary strategic studies as much as history more narrowly defined and, when the First World War broke out five years later, he and other members of the Faculty produced a series of pamphlets which set out to explain the war's underlying causes to a wider public. Although the expectation that the holder of the chair span both past and present has been a persistent feature in the 100 years of its existence, the subsequent growth in the study of war across several disciplines has now made it impossible for a single academic to be master of the subject in its entirety.

Therefore, a principal attraction of the Changing Character of War project, both to Oxford and, presumably, to the Leverhulme Trust, was the opportunity which it offered of generating truly interdisciplinary study. Although in 2003 Oxford still had only one established post in the study of war, it could claim several scholars with interests in war. Five of them—Guy Goodwin-Gill, David Rodin, Sir Adam Roberts, Henry Shue, and Hew Strachan—put together the proposal which won the grant for the university. Collectively, they represented (in the order of those names) the disciplines of Law, Philosophy, Politics, and History, all of them core subjects in this volume. Over the five years of the Leverhulme funding, each discipline profited from the insights of

the others, and the members of the programme found themselves moving towards a common vocabulary, progressively related less to individual disciplines and more to war itself. The programme and this book have therefore already begun to respond to the call sounded by Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton in the volume's final chapter. Certainly, the conclusions of the programme have proved even greater than the sum of its parts.

An important reason for this growth in understanding has been the programme's engagement with practitioners, particularly (but not exclusively) through its series of seminars on Campaigning and Generalship organized by one of its Visiting Fellows, Major-General Jonathan Bailey.<sup>1</sup> The fact that British forces were engaged in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan throughout the duration of the programme contributed immeasurably to the realization that the character of war is always changing, to the awareness of fresh ethical and legal pressures on war's conduct, and to the reciprocal relationship between academic and soldier.

When the Leverhulme Trust advertised the Changing Character of War competition, the context was set by the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001. Some more hyperbolic commentators believed that so radical and so lasting were their effects that they had changed not merely the character of war but even its nature. President George W. Bush's decision to declare a global war on terrorism elevated a means of fighting into an end, and created a set of goals so broad as to suggest that this might be a struggle as persistent and protracted as the Cold War had been. By the time that the Changing Character of War conference convened at St Antony's College, Oxford, in March 2009, a sense of perspective had begun to be restored: the Obama administration was drawing back from the rhetoric of the global war on terror, and cynics were tending to argue that in the aftermath of 9/11, terrorism studies had flourished even more than terrorism itself.

This is not to say that terrorism is not a feature of war today. It is a subject that has directly engaged two members of the Changing Character of War team, Uwe Steinhoff, one of the programme's initial cohort of research associates, who has worked on the ethics of terrorism, and Audrey Kurth Cronin, the programme's director of studies between 2005 and 2008 and the author of a major study of how terrorism ends.<sup>2</sup> Neither of them claims that terrorism has ousted other forms of war and both are well aware that terrorism's antecedents go far back beyond 9/11. Bruce Hoffman, whose reputation as a leading student of terrorism was firmly established before 9/11, uses his chapter to trace the continuities in terrorist identities, but his stress in this volume on similarity across time does not blind him in his other writings to the immediacy or scale of the threat.<sup>3</sup> More explicitly, Cronin, in her chapter, points up the changes in what she calls the motivation, method, mobilization, morphology, and mindset of terrorism, and Azar Gat, in the opening chapter

of the book, warns against the academic temptation to reduce the significance of terrorism by too much contextualization.

One of the reasons that the 9/11 attacks resonated so loudly within the academic study of war was that scholars before the attacks were already suggesting that new actors within war were threatening what was presumed to be the state's monopoly in the application of armed force. In 1991, Martin van Creveld argued in *On future war* (US title: *The transformation of war*) that guerrillas, bandits, and terrorists would oust traditional armed forces. Van Creveld was not best served by the timing of the book's appearance, which coincided with a classic interstate war as the armed forces of a US-led coalition waged a campaign of manoeuvre against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. For many, its quick success seemed to be a portent of the future rather than a last hurrah. Led by the United States, and in thrall to it, the armed forces of NATO and of other advanced countries throughout the 1990s followed the trajectory set in the first Gulf War. Much of the intellectual running in the study of war was shaped by operational level thinking, which built on the ideas of manoeuvre and tempo, saw new technologies as confirming the advantages which professional armed forces could bring to such forms of warfare, and developed bodies of self-sustaining thought through concepts like the 'revolution in military affairs', 'network-centric warfare', 'effects-based operations', and 'transformation'.<sup>4</sup> In 2003, Major-General Robert Scales, who had presided over the US Army's 'Army after next project' between 1995 and 1997, published *Yellow Smoke: The future of land warfare for America's military*. His vision of war, unlike van Creveld's, assumed that war 'cannot be divorced from political authority', and that the United States' enemies would continue to have the trappings of statehood, including control over the army and the police.

The 'manoeuvrists' understood war largely in terms of how it would be waged, but their critics—like Martin van Creveld—asked who would do the fighting. They argued that it would not be the apostles of manoeuvre, the state-controlled professional armed forces. In *New and old wars: Organized violence in the global era*, first published in 1999, Mary Kaldor focused on the rise of warlords. Her principal case studies were derived from the Balkans, rather than Africa, the focus of such thinking since decolonization in the 1960s; indeed by redirecting a phenomenon associated with the problems of emerging statehood to Europe, Kaldor was able to argue—as van Creveld had done—that it was one that was growing rather than contracting. For Kaldor, warlords needed war to sustain their income flows, their crime, and their drug-running, as well as their authority. In other words, unlike states, warlords had an interest in the perpetuation of war rather than in its termination.

The contributors to this book, particularly Mats Berdal, are uniformly sceptical about 'new wars', but the title was catchy. Kaldor's use of it was appropriated three years later by Herfried Münkler, when he described how

states themselves were abdicating their monopoly of armed force through their use of mercenaries.<sup>5</sup> But he drew a number of crucial distinctions central to the more variegated picture painted by the Changing Character of War programme, and especially by Sarah Percy in her work on the privatization of military force.<sup>6</sup> First was the need for a historical context in understanding what was really new, as opposed to what seemed to be new. The debate about the relationship between mercenaries and states (both weak and strong) was addressed by Machiavelli at the beginning of the sixteenth century, is central to David Parrott's discussion of early modern warfare in this book, remained a vibrant one in Europe until the French Revolution in 1789, and even thereafter. Strategic studies had lost contact with its historical roots. Second, Münkler pointed out that strong states, which employed private military companies to fulfil some of the functions that they would previously have entrusted to their armed forces, did so out of fiscal strength rather than out of weakness. Mercenaries were only problematic for weak states which lacked the monopoly of armed force, and so—like warlords—were symptomatic of a deeper set of structural problems.

Münkler aired some uncomfortable truths, one of them being that aid provided by strong states and by non-governmental organizations to help the victims of war in broken states might actually sustain the conflict. Just as private military companies have a vested interest in the opportunities for profit which armed conflict creates for them, so insurgents and guerrillas are able to feed off the aid and supplies provided to the indigenous victims of war. Refugee camps can be the conduits through which food and medicines can be extracted, willingly or unwillingly, to reach those in the field. Wars develop their own economic lives, and in backward countries war itself can sustain economic activity. In Afghanistan in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the fragmentation of governmental authority enabled the cultivation of poppy for the heroin trade and so generated the profits to feed the war. The US-led coalition, which responded by pumping in aid for construction projects, education, and welfare, in ways and at levels which would have been unimaginable without the war, inadvertently confirmed that war can pay.

The proposition that war might have economic utility was one with which Western liberal orthodoxy has found it hard to come to terms, particularly in the aftermath of two devastating world wars. Conflict constituted disinvestment. But in early modern Europe, war was related both to state growth and, partly as a result, to the emergence of the cash economy. Soldiers were paid, and their supplies and equipment bought, with specie that the state raised through taxation. Monarchs went to war for profit, a motive which held good until the later stages of Napoleon's career; even in 1871 France paid for its defeat at the hands of Prussia with an indemnity.<sup>7</sup>

So unfamiliar had some of these features become to Western conceptions of war that commentators privileged them with a title that suggested both a

novelty and a unity that they largely lacked. ‘Asymmetric warfare’ was a neologism that, although associated with non-state actors, embraced their preferred tactical responses more than it described the groups who adopted those responses. They knew that they would lose a battle against professional armed forces trained for ‘manoeuvre warfare’, and so they rejected such a confrontation. Instead, they employed methods of fighting that suited their own strengths, rather than those of their opponents, and these tended to be irregular and unconventional. Nothing in this was very new: it was military common sense. But it seemed new to those who assumed that the ‘Western way of warfare’ not only rested on battle—and particularly bloody battles at that—but was also guaranteed success because it was underpinned by democratic principles.<sup>8</sup>

Central to all these issues were the state and its position in relation to war. Martin van Creveld and Mary Kaldor had both misread Clausewitz, in order to associate his description of war solely with the state.<sup>9</sup> During the Cold War, the state had indeed seemed to be supreme in its monopoly of armed force, not least because the most sophisticated weapons of the day, nuclear missiles, were in the hands solely of certain states. Indeed, they became a way of distinguishing those which were great powers from those which were not. The end of the Cold War, not least because it reduced the salience of nuclear deterrence, was far more important in our understanding of the relationship between war and the state than were the 9/11 attacks. It left the United States in triumphant mood, the dominant but democratic force in a unipolar world, thus fulfilling—or so it seemed—its manifest destiny.

In just over a decade, the 9/11 attacks had threatened the assumptions which underpinned this world vision, but they did so less because of the attacks themselves (which for all their awfulness were no more than pinpricks for a great power) and more because of the United States’ mismanagement of its response. Unprepared for the shock of 9/11 (despite warnings which in hindsight looked clear enough),<sup>10</sup> it sought to provide a context for what had happened in the suggestion that the state was undergoing some form of existential crisis. Philip Bobbitt argued, in a book whose antecedents predated the 9/11 attacks, but whose publication in 2002 was neatly timed to ride on the hysteria they generated, that the nation state, which ‘justified itself as an instrument to serve the welfare of the people (the nation)’, was being replaced by the ‘market state’, which ‘exists to maximize the opportunities’ of its citizens. Having constructed a questionable edifice on the basis of a selective reading of the past, he then went on in a second book, published in 2008, to relate the rise of terrorism to the specific vulnerabilities of the market state.<sup>11</sup>

Part of the difficulty in ‘lumping’ events, which is what Bobbitt was doing, is that in pursuing general trends, which by definition can only be evident in hindsight, it fails to allow for contingency or exception. Categorization rides roughshod over difference. The US administration, in identifying ‘failed’ or

'rogue' states as the principal threats to its security, similarly raised existential questions about the state and its future. The proliferation of states, with almost 200 in the world by the end of the millennium, and with many formed on the basis of neither military strength nor military action, certainly helped more 'weak' states survive. Moreover, the end of the Cold War loosened the pressures that had subsumed them within alliance blocs. But before 1789, the geographical space that is now Germany embraced even more petty states, and the correlation of such weakness with a threat to the international order was no more invariably true then than it is now. This is not to say that the circumstances were and are the same; by the late eighteenth century, nationalism was a driver for the aggregation of states, not least in Germany and Italy, whereas by the early twenty-first century it was more likely to be a source of division and separation. The assumption was that globalization, particularly through the Internet and new forms of real-time communication, was destroying state frontiers and with them national identities. And yet there was something deeply paradoxical in all this. Ethnicity, among Czechs as distinct from Slovaks, Slovenes as distinct from Croats, and even Scots as distinct from English, provided greater national cohesion, so much so that it possessed the potential to create new state entities. The state still remained—provided it was not among the minority of states that had failed to establish a monopoly of armed force—the principal repository of military power.

The sense of crisis had been deepened by the self-serving reading of Clausewitz which identified war solely with the state and saw war exclusively as an instrument of state policy. That was not how Clausewitz defined war; rather, it was how Clausewitz defined war's utility. War itself, he roundly declared at the very beginning of *On war*, is 'a clash of wills'.

This issue—the question of what is war and what is not war—had to be the departure point for the Changing Character of War programme. We could hardly answer the question which we were being asked from the very outset of the programme's existence—is the character of war changing? Or, more precisely, in what ways is the character of war changing?—if we were not sure what war is.

So, the seminar series at the beginning of the calendar year 2004, the first term of the programme's existence, was designed to address the big question of what is war, the better to be able to address the principal, but necessarily second-order, issues. After a series of talks by subject specialists both in areas where the programme lacked research expertise as well as areas in which it possessed it, we agreed on five criteria. First, war involves the use of force, although there can be a state of war in which active hostilities are suspended, and some would argue that the threat of the use of war (as in the Cold War) constitutes war. Fighting is what defines war, a point made by Clausewitz, and echoed in this book by Barkawi and Brighton. Second, war rests on contention.

If one party attacks another, the other must respond for war to occur, or else what will follow will be murder, massacre, or occupation. This reaction means that possibly the most important feature of war is reciprocity: part of the problem with much operational thought in the 1990s was that it had forgotten that the enemy has a vote and that his responses might be 'asymmetrical' or even unpredictable. Third, war assumes a degree of intensity and duration to the fighting: scale matters, and skirmishes and border clashes are not necessarily war. Fourth, those who fight do not do so in a private capacity, and fifth, and consequently, war is fought for some aim beyond fighting itself. Both the last two criteria tend normatively to be associated with states and their policies, but they do not have to be defined in these ways, and wars have been pursued—for example, by Germany and Japan in 1945—beyond the point at which they seem able to deliver worthwhile results.<sup>12</sup>

Having established a degree of consensus, the programme's next task was to identify what within this framework was changing. The historians argued that we could not identify change if we did not have the historical awareness which enabled us to recognize continuity. This is not to say that the historians' role is to stress the lack of change: that would be to misunderstand the real challenges for the historical profession and to condone much that is lazy in strategic thought. If we seek 'lessons from history' and jump from the appearance of continuity to conclude that at bottom nothing changes, we fail to tackle the really difficult task which confronts the student of the past. As the great French medieval economic historian, Marc Bloch, wrote, reflecting on his experience of the two world wars:

History is, in its essentials, the science of change. It knows and it teaches that it is impossible to find two events that are ever exactly alike, because the conditions from which they spring are never identical. I do not mean to deny that it recognizes certain elements in the evolution of mankind which, though not permanent, are extremely long-lived. But even while it lays this down, it has to admit that the possible number of their combinations is almost infinite. It realizes, properly enough, that successive civilizations show repetitive patterns, and that these resemble one another in their general lines, if not in their details, when the conditions determining them may be said to have a family likeness. It can even try to see into the future, and not always, I think, unsuccessfully. But the lesson it teaches is not that what happened yesterday will necessarily happen to-morrow, or that the past will go on reproducing itself. By examining how and why yesterday differed from the day before, it can reach conclusions which will enable it to foresee how to-morrow will differ from yesterday.<sup>13</sup>

The historians in the programme agreed that the state's role in relation to war was changing but attributed that in part to the fact that states increasingly define themselves in national terms rather than in state terms, while at the same time using multinational institutions—pre-eminently the United

Nations and NATO—to legitimate their actions.<sup>14</sup> The historians therefore tended to interpret war as a collective act engaged in by communities often defined not only in political terms but also in national or ethnic ones.

The philosophers, on the other hand, stressed that a big change had been in the individualization of war. In the just-war tradition, soldiers kill their enemies as part of a collective identity, but in wars governed by international humanitarian law, killing is justified on the basis of a moral responsibility to act against behaviour which defies the norms of humanitarianism. These are the sorts of dilemmas which lie at the heart of David Rodin's chapter. The current convention is that killing carried out by soldiers within a war waged according to the norms of just-war theory is morally justified even if the decision to go to war in the first place is unjust. But can it be? If the war is unjust in the first place, how can those called up to fight it be acting in ethically acceptable ways, even if they respect non-combatant immunity, take prisoners, and so on? And in that case what is the relationship between individual morality, and individual responsibility, and collective action? Al-Qaeda holds the peoples of democratic states responsible for the actions done by their governments in their names. Thomas Hippler's chapter on Giulio Douhet's early thinking on air power shows that a similar logic underpinned the rationales for strategic bombing: that terror attacks on cities would turn a people against its own state in order to terminate the war. Inherent in all this is an idea central to the thought of Carl Schmitt, and explored by Patricia Owens, that man's fundamental identity is political, and that all war is therefore potentially 'existential'. If the law is less an overarching set of absolute and internationally accepted norms than a tool of states which themselves have political goals, then law is simply a creature of the state's interest. Henry Shue's discussion of the United States' readiness to define torture in terms which suit its needs rather than conform to international agreements provides a precise illustration of this point. But in the United Kingdom, and especially as a result of the European Convention of Human Rights, civilian courts have increasingly opted to intervene on behalf of individuals in war-related issues, and so found themselves at odds with the state rather than its servant.

This interaction between the public sphere of war and the private sphere of moral responsibility, and the consequent dialogue between ethics, political philosophy, and law, has proved particularly fruitful for the Changing Character of War programme. After 9/11, moral issues which were deemed to be closed, of which the prohibition on the use of torture was one, were both reopened and specifically challenged by state behaviour. The clear definition of non-combatant status was already a problem for 'total war' in the early twentieth century. Why should a civilian worker in an armaments factory be exempt from aerial attack? But, if he or she was a legitimate target, should not the farmer producing the food which sustained the soldier in battle or the industrial worker in the factory also be treated as a *de facto* combatant? This

sort of thinking culminated in 1945 in the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, seen by G.J. De Groot in his chapter as ‘a climactic assertion of the right of a nation to slaughter civilians for purposes of national security’. As Guy Goodwin-Gill argues, the employment of child soldiers, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa—at once both combatants of war and victims of war—foreshadowed some of the problems which have multiplied since 9/11, even if their origins precede it.<sup>15</sup> The suicide bomber who is coerced to attack, or who for other reasons such as age could be exempt from responsibility for his or her actions, shows the fuzziness of the combatant/non-combatant distinction in practice. Certainly, the association of civilian status with the status of non-combatant has proved hard to maintain.

An assumption underpinning the security debate at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries was that these were both new developments and ones which were somehow worsening: that the world was becoming less secure, not more so. Somehow, the period before 1990 or even 1945 became recast as an era of stable international order, despite two devastating world wars and their attendant horrors. This sort of thinking declared it as axiomatic that at the start of the twentieth century most of those killed in war were soldiers but that at its end 90 per cent were civilians. The fallacy in this generalization, addressed in part in this book by Adam Roberts, rests not just on its identification of civilians with non-combatants; it is also statistically, historically, and culturally ignorant. We have no secure grasp on the numbers of civilians killed in earlier wars, including the First World War. Should such figures include those who died of disease which may have been promoted by war (but there again may not have been)? How should wars outside Europe be treated, particularly those of colonization and decolonization, where warriors were not necessarily able to conform to the definitions of belligerent status propagated by the Geneva conventions, where few were counting the dead, and where economic warfare, for example the destruction of crops and villages, may have resulted in indirect casualties, for example through starvation? And, even if it is still true that more civilians than soldiers die in wars waged today, that does not contradict the point made by Pascal Vennesson’s chapter, that wars are fewer and that losses of life in battle are declining. Paradoxically, the proportionate increase in the number of those civilians who died in wars at the end of the twentieth century, if true, may be no more than a reflection on the dramatic decline in overall numbers of war-related deaths.

After the 9/11 attacks, both the United States and the United Kingdom abandoned any norms against preventive war. They conflated the notion of pre-emption, the attack of an opponent whose intention himself to attack is manifest, with the notion of prevention, the attack of a potential enemy who might threaten an attack at some stage in the future.<sup>16</sup> Attacks at a distance, both in geographical space and also in time (in other words, before the threat could be construed as imminent), fostered the idea that such wars were not

mandatory but 'discretionary'. Again Western liberal orthodoxy, conditioned to see war as at best an awful necessity, struggled to make sense of so-called 'wars of choice'. Leaders, including President Obama and the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who by 2009 argued that the war in Afghanistan was not 'discretionary' but 'necessary', principally in order to forestall terrorist attacks on their own homelands, struggled to persuade their own populations that such was the case.

Public opinion, certainly in European states after the end of the Cold War, seems to believe that interstate war has declined since 1945 and that civil war is increasing. This shows the force of both long- and short-term memories. The shadow of the Second World War, reinforced by the threat of all-out nuclear war in the Cold War, kept alive the belief that true interstate war could only be major war; in reality, interstate war has occurred at about the same frequency ever since 1945, with the exception of the years 1990–2.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the incidence of civil war is now declining from a peak, which Stathis Kalyvas in his chapter in this book links to the problems of state formation specifically associated with colonial withdrawal. But these beliefs, that international war is obsolescent and civil war ascendant, affect perceptions of what war is. The first sees war as the final sanction which maintains international order; in this framework, war retains utility. The second suggests the idea of war as chaos: civil war is deemed to be profoundly destructive and unproductive, its role in the formation of strong states, including both the United Kingdom and the United States, strangely forgotten.

The conceptual force of major interstate war and yet its relative absence help explain the attraction to military doctrine writers (not least within NATO) of the idea of a 'spectrum of conflict', where the use of armed force occurs at many points, most of them not involving any formal declaration of war by states. But the 'spectrum of conflict' erodes any clear demarcation between war and peace. Today's ideas of peace are very ambitious, encompassing more than the absence of war, and including the provision of justice and good government, as well as human security more broadly defined. As a result conflict is seen as both pervasive and persistent. Peacekeeping operations in the 1990s, which developed into peace enforcement, and then into counterinsurgency, suggested that both peace, at one end of the spectrum, and general war, at the other, belonged on a continuum.

Those working in the Changing Character of War programme recognized the force of all these ideas—not only the continuity within the spectrum from peace to war but also the fusion of the public and the private in war and the erosion of the distinction between collective action and individual responsibility. But we also realized that their combined effect was to create uncertainty about how to define war below the level of major international war, a phenomenon which today is indeed fortunately so rare that it does not provide an effective method of measurement or of understanding for most Western audiences.

Whatever our disciplinary background, we agreed that change and newness are not the same, and that change can be a reversal back to something which has existed before. We were therefore persuaded of the force of Clausewitz's distinction between the nature of war, which has an essential continuity, even integrity, and the character of individual wars, which vary. History therefore can do more than simply provide background knowledge; it can be a route into understanding these themes. This is not to claim that history, any more than any of the other core disciplines which the programme has embraced, is capable of providing universal explanations of what war is or is not. The programme does not claim to have developed a comprehensive way of looking at war; instead, it has used different disciplines and varying examples to generate sufficient insights which have then coalesced to produce themes and patterns.

Undoubtedly, there are more—both more insights to corroborate our arguments and more patterns which have escaped us entirely. Those working within the Changing Character of War programme, although a reasonably large group by the standards of Oxford research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and by comparison with most units studying war in the United Kingdom today, have been as conscious of the programme's disciplinary weaknesses as its strengths. Geographically, it has failed to escape as much as it would have liked the conceptions of the West, both of the United States and of Europe. Too much of the study of war is shaped by America's preoccupations; the programme has consciously tried to provide a European balance, but it has failed to do justice to Africa and probably to Asia. Secondly, in seeing change as precipitated overwhelmingly by social and political influences, it has neglected the role of science and technology. Its approach has the virtue (if it is that) of being fashionable: technological supremacy, as manifested in the military power of the United States, was thwarted in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it may also be selective. The conceptual dominance of nuclear weapons in the Cold War, the function of qualitative superiority in conventional warfare in Operation Desert Storm in 1991, and the role of air power in the Kosovo campaign in 1999, all suggest that in downplaying technology the Changing Character of War programme too may be privileging current conflicts as much as did the technological determinism of much military thought in the 1990s.

If that is the case, it has been in good company. The continuing force of Carl von Clausewitz's *On war* derives in large part from the very fact that his understanding of war rests to a remarkably limited extent on the impact of new technologies. His brief history of war, in book VIII, Chapter 3, privileges political change in explaining changes in war's character; in his own lifetime, the French Revolution had so mobilized the resources of the state through its identification with the nation that war had approached a state of wholeness or entirety, which he dubbed 'absolute war'. For him the biggest likely change to

war was the impact of a true 'people in arms'. What he did not envisage was that air power would take war into a third dimension, or that the capacity for intelligence collection (if not analysis) would be transformed through electronics.

Because Clausewitz was not sure that all wars in the future would conform to the pattern of the Napoleonic wars, just as wars in the past had not, he used paradox to probe for truth. His book uses dialectics to reveal war's nature more than it uses unequivocal assertion. That too has been the approach of the Changing Character of War programme. Perhaps it suits our academic natures, just as it revealed the tension in Clausewitz between the man of action, the soldier and aspirant field commander, and the reflective product of the Enlightenment. This introduction has already raised some of the debates that have been important in deepening our understanding: that between war and peace, and the problem of defining the latter as well as the former, and particularly whether it includes the mandatory provision of certain irreducible human rights; that between the state and non-state actors, who are in fact not opposites, not least because many non-state actors aspire to statehood and few seem hell-bent on destroying the idea of the state in general as opposed to certain states. There are others, most of them also expressed most dramatically in terms of apparent contradictions and all of them revolving specifically around the state.

The state occupies a specific geographical space; it has a local and regional identity. And yet it interacts internationally. This seems to suggest that a civil war is geographically contained, whereas an interstate war is by definition fought across a state's frontiers. In practice, however, the distinction between civil war and interstate war is not so neat. The wars in Iraq and—even more—in Afghanistan were civil wars between competing factions determined to impose their own systems of governance in their own territories. But they were not just that; they had international repercussions, and they also acquired some of the trappings of interstate war, especially given the intervention in both countries by neighbours from beyond their frontiers and ready to use armed force—from Iran in Iraq's case and from Pakistan in Afghanistan's.

The difficulty of sustaining the distinction between combatants and civilians has already been alluded to, and yet that problem should not surprise us as both derive their identities in most international law from the state. The clearest legitimate combatant is the uniformed soldier of the army of a state. Similarly, civilians are citizens of states, and if they aspire to non-belligerent status do so in part because of their functions within the state, of which they are members and from which they derive certain benefits and obligations in exchange for their civic rights. If we follow Martin van Creveld or Mary Kaldor in doubting the state and its definition, then we may also not be able to define who is a civilian, and we may also struggle to create any presumption of

innocence in any group. This is the problem we already confront with child soldiers or suicide bombers.

Whether the actions of the last two groups are legitimate or illegitimate depends not only on a set of presumptions derived from the *ius in bello* tradition, from what is acceptable within the conduct of war, but also from that of *ius ad bellum*, from the justice of the cause in whose name the war is fought. If the child soldier fights for reasons that are legitimate, for example as part of a force resisting occupation by an invading army, then he or she does so under right authority. Some would therefore reverse the line of argument adopted by David Rodin, and argue, exactly as Alia Brahimi shows that they do argue, that the illegitimate use of child soldiers or suicide bombers is in fact offset by the legitimacy of the cause for which they are fighting, and that *ius ad bellum* both feeds into and in this case trumps *ius in bello*.

These are understandably live issues on Jihadi websites, as they were in the Second World War among peoples resisting German occupation—even after their states had surrendered and so in terms of international law had ended the war between themselves and Germany. The dichotomy here is that between accountability and empowerment. Public expectations in regard to the decision to go to war and to the manner of its conduct, voiced through the ‘traditional’ media, such as opinion polls, the press and broadcasting, and the new media of websites, blogs, and mobile telephones, hold governments and their armed forces to account. So too do courts, domestic and international. Governments, on the other hand, empower their armed forces to use violence and to do so in ways that can be at odds with the norms of peacetime democracies. Al-Qaeda goes further: it holds the people of a democracy to account for the actions carried out in its name by the government which it has elected. In other words, on this reading, the democratic process means that the electorate not only holds its government to account but also empowers it.

Therefore, the essence of a dialectical approach to the study of war may reside less in the pairing of dichotomies and more in their fusion. For Clausewitz, this was part of the interplay between theory and reality; the former sets up alternative propositions, but the latter shows how much they react off each other in practice. Thus, the truism, that reciprocity lies at the heart of war, reasserts itself. For many in the programme, the alternatives posited above are better seen as end points in a continuum, just as they are in the spectrum of conflict.

The challenge that these insights threw up for the programme was how to produce an organization both for its summation conference and for this resulting book which would get to their heart while keeping the papers and chapters to the themes which best reflected the disciplinary expertise of their authors. We resolved this by dividing our work according to five major subject areas:

1. The need for a historical perspective: what has changed?
2. The purpose of war: why go to war?
3. The changing identities of combatants: who fights?
4. The changing identities of non-combatants;
5. The ideas which enable us to understand war.

The discussion that resulted and the chapters in this book produced yet another way—indeed a third way—of conceptualizing the relationship between change and continuity, reflecting the fact that they can often pull in different directions at the same time. It is therefore useful to distinguish between three aspects of change and continuity: their empirical manifestations (what has changed and in what form that change occurred), their conceptual ‘fabrications’ (how our conceptual approaches to and narratives about war impact on our perceptions of change and continuity), and, lastly, their political implications (how political power and interest influence and are influenced by perceptions of change and continuity in the practice of war).

## THE EMPIRICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

A number of chapters in this book come to the conclusion that the practice of war has changed over the past 500 years. The most striking factual changes in this respect are, first, the unlocking of the close relationship between war and the state and, second, the unlocking of the relationship between war and the nation. However, this change is not to be misunderstood as a sudden dissolution of the ‘normal’ trinity consisting of war, the state, and the nation, and the dawn of a new, less orderly, and more chaotic era of war. Rather, the interlocking of war and the state was, according to David Parrott, an exceptional case in the history of war that prevailed only for the rather short period from 1750 to 1950. Similarly, the nationalization of war started only with the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815), as Michael Broers reminds us, and, according to Pascal Vennesson, it is currently declining: today’s wars are being largely fought ‘without the people’.

Importantly, this tendency affects not only conventional interstate war but also intrastate war. It does not result in a replacement of the former with the latter, as many scholars assume. Rather, as Stathis Kalyvas shows, just like interstate war, civil war was, for a certain period of time, characterized by a coincidence of nationalist ideologies (mixed together with Marxist ideas), large-scale mobilization of the population, and the aim to build state(-like) institutions in those areas that were controlled by the insurgents, if only to be able to make effective use of the available resources. Whereas earlier forms of

guerrilla warfare within Europe were often motivated by resistance to the nationalization of war (e.g. the French war in the Vendée 1793–6), the insurgencies that accompanied the wave of decolonization after the Second World War often drew upon nationalist ideologies. After the Cold War, however, as Kalyvas notes, the connection between war, nation, and state dissolved with respect to civil wars too: today's civil wars tend to mobilize along the lines of either local or transnational identities. Moreover, they are either too peripheral to pose a serious threat to the state or they engage in terrorist tactics for which state-building activities comparable with those of the nationalist–Marxist insurgencies are not necessary.

As Kimberly Marten argues, today's warlords—unlike those of early modern Europe, who were central actors in the state-building process<sup>18</sup>—are unlikely to engage in state-building activities. Paradoxically, this is mainly a result of the success of the state system: warlords are unlikely to acquire a sufficiently large chunk of territory to be able to turn it into a state of its own. Therefore, it is more profitable for them to continue operating on the margins of one or several states than to create a viable, law-governed polity. This observation should caution us against drawing too dramatic conclusions regarding the dissolution of the trinity of war, the state, and the nation: the unlocking of this close connection does not mean, as many globalization theorists argue, that the state as such becomes decentralized and powerless.

If the change that we are observing is to a certain extent one of retrogression rather than of progress, the interlocking of war, the state, and the nation is an historical anomaly. Instead, we are currently revolving into a phase in which this trinity can no longer be taken for granted as a factual entity, although it retains its analytical value. Closely related to the dissolution of the connection between war and the state is a development in the normative realm, which Stephen Neff has called the rebirth of just-war thinking in the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> The notion of war as an essential tool of statecraft slowly disappeared after the end of the First World War and with the foundation of the League of Nations. Peace was seen as the norm in international relations. After the Second World War, this tendency was strengthened, as the Charter of the United Nations contained an explicit ban on the aggressive use of force and spelled out in detail the very narrow conditions under which force could be used. Not only did this development help to loosen the connection between war and the state at a normative level, it also had the very practical effect that states came together in multilateral security institutions with the purpose of defending themselves collectively against potential aggressors. However, as Anne Deighton argues in her chapter, these multilateral security institutions did not simply replace the state as a strategic actor. Rather, from the very beginning they suffered from the paradox that they were based on the proscription of the aggressive use of force, while at the same time being charged with stopping aggressors, if necessary with military means. This ambivalence

about the use of force has always been a characteristic feature of multilateral security institutions, and is likely to account at least in part for their shortfalls.

However, change in the practice of war can also take the form of a pendulum swinging back and forth. This holds in particular in those areas where there is a close connection between certain norms and the conduct of war. One such area is humanitarian intervention. Contrary to the widely held belief that humanitarian intervention is a phenomenon of the post-Cold War era, David Trim shows in his chapter that the use of force on humanitarian grounds has been practised throughout the past 450 years, although not in a consistent way. Rather, the pendulum has swung back and forth between, on the one hand, humanitarian concerns and a greater flexibility in the use of force, and on the other the absolute view of sovereignty and its corollary, non-intervention. In a similar vein, Sibylle Scheipers argues in her chapter that the legal regime governing the treatment of prisoners of war and detainees has oscillated between two paradigms: decisions on protections for captured individuals were either made along the lines of the distinction between regular and irregular fighters, or they depended on the captor's assessment of the legitimacy of the cause for which the captives had fought.<sup>20</sup>

Whether change occurs in the form of a pendulum swinging back and forth or as the dissolution of an historical anomaly, it seems to happen more slowly and incrementally than many scholars assume. Although the end of the Cold War had a deep and lasting impact on the structure of the international system, it did not lead to a sudden paradigm shift in the practice of war. As Mats Berdal argues in his chapter, many of the so-called 'new wars' have strong roots in the Cold War period and the era of colonialism. This applies both to their causes and to the weapons with which they are fought. The technologies of war have in fact changed less dramatically and rapidly than the rhetoric associated with them suggests. In part, this is no more than the reflection of the life cycle of many big-item weapons' systems, including aircraft, warships, tanks, and missiles. The period from research and development, through procurement to deployment and eventual obsolescence, can span half a century. In part, it reflects the fact that certain weapons, including infantry small arms and manned aircraft, have reached a level of perfection which amounts to a steady state, where improvements modify rather than overthrow tactical practice. In this sense, 'the shadow of the past' works as a stabilizer and provides for a certain degree of continuity.

The 'shadow of the past' also plays a role in recent and/or ongoing wars in sub-Saharan Africa. They are frequently subsumed under the category of the so-called 'new wars' that are allegedly no longer fought for political ideas or interests but for identities.<sup>21</sup> Yet, according to Will Reno, the pre-conflict political conditions have a decisive impact on the way in which these wars are fought: 'connected violence' is committed by actors who had privileged access to resources in the pre-war political system. These actors are relatively

detached from popular support, and as a result more likely to direct violence against the civilian population. In contrast, 'marginalized violence' is characteristic for actors who held less privileged positions in the pre-war political system. They tend to discriminate more in their use of violence, as they depend to a greater extent on the support of the local population. In such cases, there is a great deal of continuity between the pre-conflict political system and the conduct of war. As a consequence, these wars appear to be deeply political although in a different way from the means–ends relationship that we usually assume operates between war and politics.

In a more general sense, norms and discourses often function as stabilizers in the practice of war. They do not inhibit change and they can themselves become subject to change, but they slow down the processes of transformation and make them more incremental. Alia Brahimi provides good examples for this mechanism in her chapter on religion and war. According to her, just-war arguments and religious claims turned out to be a double-edged sword for both Al-Qaeda and the Bush administration. On the one hand, both drew upon the just-war discourse in order to justify their actions; on the other, by entering into that normative and religious discourse, they made themselves vulnerable to the charge that they used those norms in an incorrect and dishonest way. This shows that norms and normative discourses have a life of their own. While they are liable to adaptation and even reinterpretation, they are also to a certain extent sticky and inert and cannot be manipulated at will.

This is not to say that norms and discourses cannot change, or cannot themselves be a driver for change in the practice of war. On the contrary, as Henry Shue shows, even legalized norms such as the definition of legitimate targets in war or the definition of torture are open to reinterpretation, in particular if a powerful actor such as the United States is pushing for such change. Yet, even a superpower's attempts at driving normative change do not go unchallenged as the current debate about torture shows. The instances of normative change discussed in this book thus indicate that norms and discourses can change. However, such transformations will happen slowly and will be accompanied by fierce battles over the definitional power and ownership of these norms.

## CONCEPTUAL 'FABRICATIONS' OF CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Much recent scholarship on war has been characterized not only by assertions of change but also of unprecedented 'newness'. Indeed, the explanatory lure of the 'new' is evident in this book: the 'military revolution' of the seventeenth century is cited by Sarah Percy, Tarak Barkawi, and Shane Brighton, all

historically aware students of politics, but is now deeply contested by early modern historians, and explicitly discounted by David Parrott. According to Mats Berdal, this assumption of change is often precisely due to a *lack of historical contextualization*. The ‘new wars’ thesis, in particular, is oblivious to history in that it is based on a stark dichotomy between ‘new wars’ and ‘old wars’, with the latter category comprising the ideal typical conventional interstate war fought by states and their regular armies for political aims. Yet, on closer inspection these supposedly ‘old’ wars are rather new when viewed against the whole history of warfare. This goes back to David Parrott’s point about the interlocking of the state and war that happened only about 1750. Moreover, even the period between 1750 and 1950 was by no means exclusively characterized by ‘old wars’. First, the ‘states make war and war makes states’ model only dominated within Europe, whereas war in the colonies or, rather, the European conquest of the colonies took different forms. Second, even within Europe, conventional interstate war did not completely prevail. On the contrary, as Stathis Kalyvas reminds us, the nationalization of war that shortly succeeded the interlocking between war and the state often triggered the emergence of guerrilla movements. And while interstate wars were in fact often fought by regular state armies, the subsequent occupations were likely to meet with resistance from irregular fighters.

In short, the perception of newness is often not so much a matter of empirical change but of our conceptual perspective on war. In particular, much depends on our treatment of history: if the past serves as a mere smokescreen for ideal typical forms of war, whereas today’s wars present themselves in a disturbing variety of forms and practices, the chances are that we perceive the present as an era of unprecedented and chaotic newness. In fact, the juxtaposition of ‘old’ and ‘new wars’ is the latest example of the tendency in international relations to think in terms of hierarchical dichotomies. As Richard Ashley observed, international relations theory often builds upon conceptual opposites in which one of the concepts serves as the regulative norm and the other as the chaotic and threatening deviation from that norm. Thinking of international relations in terms of dichotomies provides for order and thus ‘opposes the realm of reasoned understanding against a realm of anarchical, threatening Otherness’.<sup>22</sup> One could easily substitute Ashley’s classical example of domestic sovereignty and international anarchy with the dichotomy between old and new wars. This creates practical problems, however, since the hierarchical dichotomy suggests that the ‘new wars’ are more chaotic, less restrained, and more ferocious than the ideal type of ‘old wars’. Indeed, as Adam Roberts notes, the ‘new wars’ discourse was partly based upon, and partly fed back into, the myth of a dramatic increase in civilian casualties in post-Cold War armed conflict. In the same vein, Pascal Vennesson’s argument that contemporary wars are fought ‘without the people’ rather than ‘amongst the people’<sup>23</sup> suggests that they are actually more restrained than the ‘new wars’ thesis would suggest.

A slightly different narrative of change is embodied in the idea of *technological progress*, embodied in such conceptions as the ‘revolution in military affairs’.<sup>24</sup> While the ‘new wars’ thesis suggests that change takes place in the form of a dramatic historical rupture, predictions of change that are based on technological transformations are more likely to suggest steady progress culminating in occasional breakthroughs. At first glance, it seems plausible to assume that technological innovations will have an impact on warfare, and, in fact, there are historical examples for such a pattern. For instance, the invention of aviation had a lasting effect on warfare in that it added a third dimension to the battlefield. Strategic thinkers and practitioners clearly perceived the ramifications of this innovation, as Thomas Hippler shows in his chapter on the Italian air power strategist Giulio Douhet. While Douhet at first thought that the appearance of aircraft on the battlefield—and, more importantly, behind the frontlines—would render war too costly and therefore almost obsolete, he later came to embrace the idea of strategic bombing. So Douhet, having initially envisaged that air power would effect a much more complete rupture with the past, then incorporated air power’s revolutionary effects within an existing framework. After all, the concept of seeking a strategic effect on the opponent’s population was not entirely new. It had its roots in both maritime blockade and siege warfare.

Several chapters in this volume confirm this tendency of strategic thinkers and strategy makers to integrate new technologies into established concepts. Gil-li Vardi shows how the German armed forces simply assimilated the technological innovations presented by the mechanization of warfare in the interwar period into their existing operational concepts. As a result, German operational planning in the Second World War was akin to the ‘Schlieffen plan on wheels’. In a similar vein, Henry Shue points out that the promise of greater accuracy engendered by precision-guided munitions over the past few decades paradoxically coincided with efforts of the technologically most advanced state, the United States, to broaden the definition of legitimate targets. Peter Singer highlights the potential challenges to war-fighting norms contained in the advent of robotics to the battlefield, and their corollary—the distancing or even removal of the human from the battlefield. The earlier examples of apparently dramatic technological innovation suggest that, while their impact on the practice of war is real, the conceptual level of norms and operational cultures takes precedence over the enabling potential of technology.

However, conceptual narratives are not only suggestive of change and unprecedented newness. Equally, they can turn out to be a trick of the eye that privileges continuity over change. In particular, this applies to the concepts of strategic and military culture. As Antulio Echevarria writes in his chapter, ‘studies of strategic culture tend to suppress change in favour of continuity; tensions and uncertainties are muted.’ In this perspective, strategic behaviour is not so much guided by changing security environments and

threats but by enduring cultural features within the military (military culture) or in the security institutions of a state (strategic culture). States and their armed forces thus tend to engage in strategic and operational actions that are largely prescribed by their cultures, in spite of the fact that the threats they face are likely to vary.<sup>25</sup> Theoretical approaches focusing on culture tend to be trapped in some form of conceptual structuralism, in which culture only makes sense if one assumes that inertia and a certain degree of permanence are its main features. Otherwise, 'culture' would disintegrate into the volatile surface of mere 'behaviour'. According to Echevarria, the first step in overcoming this rigid structuralism consists in questioning the assumption of strategic culture as a singular, consistent, and uncontested entity, and in allowing conceptually for a plurality of ways of war. At the same time, plurality means contestation among the proponents of the different ways of war, which in turn enables us to understand strategic culture not as static but as constantly evolving. In this way, strategic culture will no longer allow us to predict the future, but it will become a strong hermeneutical tool to understand both continuity and change in the past and the present practice of war.

#### POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

As mentioned above, the perception of unprecedented newness is often caused by a lack of historical contextualization. But political concerns can be a powerful motivation privileging the perception of change over that of continuity. Patricia Owens argues in her chapter that one of the Bush administration's most authoritative arguments for undermining the established legal framework of warfare and for strengthening the power of the executive was the recurrent narrative of the 'war on terror' as an entirely new kind of conflict. Although the 'new wars' thesis and the political discourse of 'jihadist' terrorism as an entirely new threat are different in terms of their substantial propositions, they share the assumption of change as a historical rupture from an era of order to a period of chaos and unprecedented newness. Hence, such narratives of factual change possess the potential to produce very real political change, a point reflected in Hew Strachan's chapter, that it is policy above all which presents strategy with the real threat of discontinuity.

But there is more to this narrative of 'jihadist' terrorism as the most important new threat. It is striking that the two chapters on terrorism in this book give differing assessments of change and continuity, depending on which aspects are explored. While Audrey Kurth Cronin writes about global terrorism from the strategic perspective and concludes that the potential for terrorist actors to acquire weapons of mass destruction requires qualitatively

new strategic answers, Bruce Hoffman stresses the demographic continuities of terrorism and insurgency. However, both aspects have been neglected in framing the politics of counterterrorism. Policymakers have not come up with a viable strategic answer to the novel threat posed by weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorists, nor have they geared counterterrorism measures towards the continuing mechanisms of recruitment. Instead, it seems, they have been trapped in the narrative of 'jihadist' terrorism, a narrative that by its very characteristic of unprecedented and chaotic newness makes it very difficult to find viable political and strategic answers to the phenomenon.

The tone of this volume is critical and corrective, rather than sensationalist and assertive. At that level, it is pragmatic rather than fanciful. It is also more optimistic than pessimistic, as the chapters of, among others, Stathis Kalyvas, Pascal Vennesson, Adam Roberts, and Guy Goodwin-Gill suggest. The story is more one of war's containment than expansion. That is not a position which a collaborative volume could have easily embraced in 1945, and it may say more about our own position in time rather than about the future. This volume reflects the present refracted through the prism of the past, more than it attempts to predict. Its own vulnerability to dramatic change is precisely why it uses a broad range of perspectives, not only of discipline and methodology but also of nationality and region, to give its conclusions greater robustness. We believe that such an approach will give its contents more endurance than many less considered but exaggerated analyses. Nonetheless, in the nature of things (and of war), this book can only ever be a form of stocktaking, an interim rather than a definite statement. All of those working in the Changing Character of War programme have learnt humility, both through the recognition of exceptions to every seeming rule and through the realization that the character of war does indeed change.

This introduction began with an acknowledgement to the Leverhulme Trustees. It needs to end with thanks to those whose administrative contribution to the programme over five years has enabled it to stay on course: Colonel David King, Dr Andrew Fairweather-Tall, Andrew Wasiliweski, Naomi King, and Rosemary Mills. The Department of Politics and International Relations has backed them up, especially Dr Mark Philp and Professor Neil MacFarlane, successively heads of department, Dr Bridget Taylor and Esther Byrom. The programme's first director of studies, Dr Audrey Kurth Cronin, has done much more to make this book possible than her chapter alone suggests. Other academics whose names may not appear on the contents page but who have contributed include Dr Alexandra Gheciu, Dr Rob Johnson, Dr Christian Malis, Dr David Alan Rosenberg, and Dr Noel Sharkey, as have a number of the programme's Visiting Fellows, especially Dr Tom Kristiansen, Carey Schofield, Ben Shephard, and the late Sir Michael Quinlan.

Sir Michael died just before the conference on the Changing Character of War was held, and only days before he was due to speak at the programme's regular seminar on his book, *Thinking about nuclear weapons: principles, problems, prospects*, published, as this book is, in the Changing Character of War series with Oxford University Press. He embodied for many of us the clarity of thought which practice lends to theory: his life and work were, and continue to be, an instructive and salutary example.

## NOTES

1. A volume which embraces this aspect of the Changing Character of War programme is in preparation, under the editorship of Jonathan Bailey, Richard Iron, and Hew Strachan.
2. Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How terrorism ends: Understanding the decline and demise of terrorist campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Uwe Steinhoff, *On the ethics of war and terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
3. For example, Bruce Hoffman, 'American jihad', *National Interest*, 20 April 2010.
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10. See *The 9/11 Commission Report: The final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington DC, 2004).
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## PART I

# The Need for a Historical Perspective: What Has Changed?

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# The Changing Character of War

*Azar Gat*

This book, and the Oxford Programme on the Changing Character of War which it sums up, would not have come into being if it were not for a deep and widespread feeling that war has entered a new era, significantly different from what we have known in the past. Such a feeling of transformation in war has occurred every generation or two over the past two centuries—during the French Revolutionary Wars, with industrialization, during the First World War, with mechanization, and with the advent of nuclear weapons. For in the modern age, marked by highly accelerated and sweeping historical change, war has followed suit. Thus, in order to lay out the changes affecting war today, it is necessary to identify the broader historical processes from which these changes arise. Some of these processes in fact go back quite far in time—only to have become more entrenched and prominent today—while others are more recent. I suggest three such broad (and in many ways interrelated) historical processes as a framework for our discussion: modernization, democratization, and technological innovation.

## MODERNIZATION

The occurrence of wars among the world's most developed countries—historically the most destructive type of interstate war, taking place among the most powerful states—has been declining dramatically. This is not a new trend. It has been very marked since the onset of the industrial age. In the century after 1815, wars among the great powers and other economically advanced countries declined in their frequency to about a *third* of what they had been in the eighteenth century, and even less compared with earlier times. The same low frequency continued during the twentieth century, although resource and manpower mobilization in the major wars that did occur, and,

hence, wars' intensity and lethality per time unit increased, most notably in the two world wars.<sup>1</sup>

What accounts for this decline in war among developed powers? Many assume that wars have simply become too expensive and lethal, with a trade-off of sorts being created between the intensity and frequency of warfare: fewer larger wars replacing many smaller ones. This hypothesis barely holds, however, because *relative to population and wealth*, wars have not become more lethal and costly than earlier in history.<sup>2</sup> Particularly in nineteenth-century Europe, the frequency of war sharply declined, even though the wars that did occur were far from being devastating, compared with both earlier and later times. No great power war occurred for thirty-nine years after Waterloo—the longest period of peace in European history until then. The ensuing Crimean War (1854–6) was limited, while the Franco-Austrian War (1859) and the Wars of German Unification (1864, 1866, 1870–1) were relatively short and inexpensive. All the same, these wars were followed by another record: forty-three peace-years among the European great powers between 1871 and 1914.

Conversely, in the twentieth century, the mere twenty-one years that separated the two world wars—the most intense and devastating wars in modern European history—do not support an inverse relation between war intensity and frequency either. Obviously, when great power wars did occur, the antagonists were able to throw much greater resources into them. At the same time, however, they proved reluctant to embark on such wars in the first place. The world wars have been followed by a third consecutive record: to date, an absence of war between economically developed countries for more than sixty years. Although this 'Long Peace' is widely attributed to the nuclear factor—a decisive factor to be sure—the trend became evident long before the advent of nuclear weapons. The three longest periods of peace by far in the modern great powers system occurred from 1815 onwards.

Even before the middle of the nineteenth century, thinkers such as Saint-Simon, Comte, John Stuart Mill, and the Manchester school were quick to note the change, realizing that it was caused by the advent of the industrial-technological-commercial revolution, the most profound transformation of human society since the Neolithic adoption of agriculture. The main change to human existence brought about by the evolution was a steep and continuous growth in wealth, a dramatic breakaway from the 'Malthusian trap' that had characterized earlier human history. Earlier increases in productivity had been largely absorbed by population growth, leaving the vast majority of humanity in dire poverty, precariously close to subsistence level. Since the outbreak of the industrial-technological revolution, however, production per capita registered substantial and sustained real growth at an average annual rate of 1.5–2.0 per cent. In the developed countries, per capita production has increased in comparison with pre-industrial times by a factor of 15–30, so far.<sup>3</sup>

This revolutionary change has worked against war in several ways. In the first place, wealth, which is undergoing rapid and continuous growth, no longer constitutes a fundamentally finite quantity as it did earlier, when the main question was how it was to be distributed. Thus, wealth acquisition has progressively shifted away from a zero-sum game, where one participant's gain could only be achieved at others' expense. Secondly (and this is the most widely recognized factor of all), as production has now been intended for sale in the marketplace rather than directly consumed by the family producers themselves as in the pre-industrial economy, economies have no longer been overwhelmingly autarkic and therefore barely affected by one another. They have become increasingly interconnected in an intensifying and spreading network of specialization, scale, and exchange—nationally as well as internationally—the much celebrated 'globalization' of the markets.<sup>4</sup> During industrialization, the European powers' foreign trade increased at twice the rate of their fast-growing GNP (gross national product), so that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, exports plus imports grew to around half of the GNP in Britain and France, more than a third in Germany, and around a third in Italy (and Japan).<sup>5</sup> In consequence, prosperity abroad became interrelated with one's own, to the extent that foreign devastation potentially depressed the entire system and was thus detrimental to a state's own well-being. This reality, already noted by John Stuart Mill,<sup>6</sup> starkly manifested itself after the First World War, as John Maynard Keynes had anticipated in his criticism of the reparations regime imposed on Germany, *The economic consequences of the peace* (1920). Thirdly, greater economic openness has decreased the likelihood of war by disassociating economic access and opportunity from the confines of political borders and sovereignty. It is no longer necessary to possess a territory politically in order to benefit from it. To conclude, the greater the yields of competitive economic cooperation, the more counterproductive and less attractive conflict becomes. Rather than war becoming more costly, as is widely believed, it is in fact peace that has been growing more profitable.

And yet, in the wake of the two world wars, nineteenth-century optimistic economic pacifism lost its credibility, at least for a while. What were the theory's flaws? Where did the generally valid economic rationale prove deficient? A first clue is provided by the causes of the great powers' wars that disturbed the nineteenth century's relative peacefulness. Apart from the Crimean War (1854–6), these were the War of 1859 that led to Italy's unification, the American Civil War (1861–5), and the Wars of German Unification (1864, 1866, 1870–1). It was above all issues of national unity, national independence, national self-determination, and national identity that constituted the deepest and most inflammable motives for these major wars. The same held true for violent conflict in general throughout Europe.<sup>7</sup> The hotspots of such conflict were nationalist: conquered and partitioned Poland, fragmented and foreign-dominated Italy, disunited Germany, the territories of

the future Belgium briefly stitched to Holland, suppressed Ireland, Habsburg-incorporated Hungary, Ottoman-held Balkans, and Alsace-Lorraine, annexed to Germany but retaining their affinity of national sentiment to France. Thus, the rising tide of modern nationalism often overrode the logic of the new economic realities, as it continues to do so today.

Furthermore, the benefits of free trade were not undiluted. As so-called 'national economists', from Alexander Hamilton and Friedrich List, pointed out, nascent industries in newly developing countries needed the protection of tariff barriers in their home markets, at least until they developed sufficiently to be able to compete successfully with the products of more established industrial economies. Following the high point of free trade in the mid-nineteenth century, the United States, Germany, France, Russia, and Japan all adopted strong protectionist policies against British manufacturing during their period of industrial take-off.

Moreover, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the great powers expanded their protectionist policies to the undeveloped parts of the world, signalling that the emergent global economy might become partitioned—rather than remaining open for all—with each imperial domain becoming closed to everybody else, as, indeed, they eventually did in the 1930s. A snowball effect ensued, generating a runaway grab for territory. For the territorially confined Germany and Japan, the need to break away into imperial *Lebensraum* or 'co-prosperity sphere' seemed particularly pressing. Here lay the seeds of the two world wars.

Since 1945, the decline of major great power war has deepened further. Nuclear weapons have concentrated the minds of all concerned wonderfully, but no less important have been the institutionalization of free trade and the closely related process of rapid and sustained economic growth throughout the capitalist world. The communist bloc did not participate in the system of free trade, but at least initially it too experienced substantial growth, and, unlike Germany and Japan, it was always sufficiently large and rich in natural resources to maintain an autarky of sorts. With the Soviet collapse and with the integration of the former communist powers into the global capitalist economy, the prospect of a major war within the developed world seems to have become very remote indeed. This is one of the main sources for the feeling that war has been transformed: its geopolitical centre of gravity has shifted radically. The modernized, economically developed parts of the world constitute a 'zone of peace'. War now seems to be confined to the less-developed parts of the globe, the world's 'zone of war', where countries that have so far failed to embrace modernization and its pacifying spin-off effects continue to be engaged in wars among themselves, as well as with developed countries.

While the trend is very real, one wonders if the near disappearance of armed conflict within the developed world is likely to remain as stark as it has been

since the collapse of communism. The post-Cold War moment may turn out to be a fleeting one. The probability of major wars within the developed world remains low—because of the factors already mentioned: increasing wealth, economic openness and interdependence, and nuclear deterrence. But the deep sense of change prevailing since 1989 has been based on the far more radical notion that the triumph of capitalism also spelled the irresistible ultimate victory of democracy; and that in an affluent and democratic world, major conflict no longer needs to be feared or seriously prepared for. This notion, however, is fast eroding with the return of capitalist non-democratic great powers that have been absent from the international system since 1945. Above all, there is the formerly communist and fast industrializing authoritarian-capitalist China, whose massive growth represents the greatest change in the global balance of power. Russia, too, is retreating from its post-communist liberalism and assuming an increasingly authoritarian character.

Authoritarian capitalism may be more viable than people tend to assume.<sup>8</sup> The communist great powers failed even though they were potentially larger than the democracies, because their economic systems failed them. By contrast, the capitalist authoritarian/totalitarian powers during the first half of the twentieth century, Germany and Japan, particularly the former, were as efficient economically as, and if anything more successful militarily than, their democratic counterparts. They were defeated in war mainly because they were too small and ultimately succumbed to the exceptional continental size of the United States (in alliance with the communist Soviet Union during the Second World War). However, the new non-democratic powers are *both* large and capitalist. China in particular is the largest player in the international system in terms of population and is showing spectacular economic growth that within a generation or two is likely to make it a true non-democratic superpower.

Although the return of capitalist non-democratic great powers does not necessarily imply open conflict or war, it might indicate that the democratic hegemony since the Soviet Union's collapse could be short-lived and that a universal 'democratic peace' may still be far off. The new capitalist authoritarian powers are deeply integrated into the world economy. They partake of the development-open-trade-capitalist cause of peace, but not of the liberal democratic cause. Thus, it is crucially important that any protectionist turn in the system is avoided so as to prevent a grab for markets and raw materials such as that which followed the disastrous slide into imperial protectionism and conflict during the first part of the twentieth century. Of course, the openness of the world economy does not depend exclusively on the democracies. In time, China itself might become more protectionist, as it grows wealthier, its labour costs rise, and its current competitive edge diminishes.

With the possible exception of the sore Taiwan problem, China is likely to be less restless and revisionist than the territorially confined Germany and

Japan were. Russia, which is still reeling from having lost an empire, may be more problematic. However, as China grows in power, it is likely to become more assertive, flex its muscles, and behave like a superpower, even if it does not become particularly aggressive. The democratic and non-democratic powers may coexist more or less peacefully, albeit warily, side by side, armed because of mutual fear and suspicion, as a result of the so-called 'security dilemma', and against worst-case scenarios. But there is also the prospect of more antagonistic relations, accentuated ideological rivalry, potential and actual conflict, intensified arms races, and even new cold wars, with spheres of influence and opposing coalitions. Although great power relations will probably vary from those that prevailed during any of the great twentieth-century conflicts, as conditions are never quite the same, they may vary less than seemed likely only a short while ago.

One is obliged to refer, if only briefly, to the global economic crisis that erupted in 2007–8. Analogies with the 1930s are inevitable. Having been the world's only superpower and a widely envied model of success during the 1920s, the United States was dealt a crushing blow by the Great Depression. It withdrew inwardly, leaving the scene to fascist and communist totalitarianism that thrived on the apparent failure of capitalist democracy. One dare predict that the current economic crisis and its repercussions will not be nearly as catastrophic. Capitalism will be adjusted and amended both domestically and internationally. The United States will need some serious domestic reconstruction, but it will remain the paramount power for a long time, while avoiding isolationism. Hopefully, the world will also resist protectionist pressures. Yet, at the same time, the global allure of state-driven and nationalist capitalist authoritarianism may grow.

## DEMOCRATIZATION

We have seen that developed countries of the industrial–technological era have tended to be far more powerful but less belligerent than premodern states. Yet, liberal and democratic societies have proven inherently more attuned to modernity's pacifying aspects. Although this proposition was long regarded with scepticism, the supporting evidence has become quite overwhelming. Relying on arbitrary coercive force at home, non-liberal and non-democratic countries have found it more natural to use force abroad. By contrast, liberal democratic societies are socialized to peaceful, law-mediated relations at home, and their citizens have grown to prefer and expect that the same norms be applied internationally. Living in increasingly tolerant, less conformist, and argumentative societies, they have grown more receptive to the Other's point of view. Promoting freedom, legal

equality, and political participation domestically, liberal democratic powers—though initially in possession of vast empires—have found it increasingly difficult to justify rule over foreign peoples without their consent. And sanctifying life, liberty, and human rights, they have proven to be failures in forceful repression. Furthermore, with the individual's life and pursuit of happiness elevated above group values, sacrifice, let alone self-sacrifice, of life in war has increasingly lost legitimacy in liberal democratic societies. War retains legitimacy only under narrow and narrowing formal and practical conditions, and is generally viewed as extremely abhorrent and undesirable.

The fruits of these deepening trends and sensibilities have been nothing short of miraculous. Their most striking and widely noted manifestation is the inter-democratic peace. International relations scholars have discovered that although modern democracies have been extensively involved in wars with non-democracies, they hardly ever fight among themselves. With growing liberalization, democracy, and economic development, the probability of war between democracies has declined to a vanishing point, where they no longer even fear or see the need to prepare for the possibility of a militarized dispute with one another. A 'positive' peace, based on shared interests, outlook, and ideals, rather than on the balance of power and deterrence, prevails among them. Domestically too, on account of their stronger consensual nature, plurality, tolerance, and, indeed, a greater legitimacy for peaceful secession, advanced liberal democracies have become practically free of civil wars, the most lethal and destructive type of war. At the same time, weak non-democratic countries (and less-developed democracies) continue to fall victim to such internal conflicts, while strong non-democratic countries prevent them through suppression.

The inter-democratic peace is merely the most conspicuous element of a larger whole. Less noted is the fact that liberal democracies tend to exhibit characteristic conflict behaviour that grows increasingly more pronounced the more liberal, democratic, and economically developed they become. Indeed, because the democracies have enjoyed a hegemonic position since the collapse of the Soviet Union, their norms have been codified in increasingly visible international institutions, and their discourse resonates through the international system, even if it does not dominate it. This is a second source of the widespread feeling that war is undergoing a profound change.

As war between great powers has become decreasingly likely and great powers' conflict has receded as well, at least for now, attention is drawn to the democracies' most typical war: limited wars with little-developed non-democratic rivals that are less affected by either of the above-mentioned pacifying trends (and therefore also continue to fight among themselves). Insurgency warfare in particular constitutes an enigma. Insurgencies have been credited for driving the democracies out of their former colonial empires

and for frustrating military interventions even where the asymmetry in regular force capability is the starkest. Mighty powers that proved capable of crushing the strongest of opponents fail to defeat the humblest of military rivals in some of the world's poorest and weakest regions. It has been barely noted that, rather than being universal, this difficulty has overwhelmingly been the lot of liberal democratic powers—and encountered precisely because they are liberal and democratic.<sup>9</sup>

Historically, the crushing of an insurgency necessitated ruthless pressure on the civilian population, which liberal democracies have found increasingly unacceptable. Premodern powers, as well as modern authoritarian and totalitarian ones, rarely had a problem with such measures, and overall they have proved quite successful in suppression. Suppression is the *sine quo non* of imperial rule. The British and French empires could sustain themselves at a relatively low cost only so long as the imperial powers felt no scruples about applying ruthless measures—in India, Ireland, Scotland, or Africa. However, as liberalization deepened from the late nineteenth century, the days of formal democratic empires became numbered even while outwardly they were reaching their greatest extent. At the turn of the twentieth century, the British setbacks and eventual compromise settlement in South Africa and withdrawal from Ireland were the signs of things to come for other liberal democratic empires as well.

Non-liberal powers were less involved in imperial wars of suppression precisely because they were so effective in suppression that resistance was not allowed to grow into insurgency. Because modern non-democratic empires were either crushed in great power wars (as with Germany and Japan) or dismantled peacefully when the totalitarian system disintegrated (as with the Soviets), the sample of insurgencies is strongly biased, as it overwhelmingly comprises struggles against liberal democratic powers. Yet, as Sherlock Holmes noted, it is 'the dog that didn't bark' under the totalitarian iron fist that is the most conspicuous.

Sceptics may cite the successful guerrilla waged against Nazi Germany in Yugoslavia and some occupied parts of the Soviet Union. However, there can be little doubt that had Germany won the Second World War and been able to apply more troops to these troublesome spots, its genocidal methods would have prevailed there too. Russia's failure in Afghanistan is another obvious counter-example, but in reality, ruthlessness has always been a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for effective suppression. Defeating irregular warfare, carried out by a backward and fanatical rival in a vast, desolate, and sparsely populated country, has always been a difficult undertaking. Afghanistan was the exception, the outlier, rather than the rule in the Soviet system. Chechnya may be more enlightening in this respect. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union felt no scruples about deporting whole populations, including the Chechens, *en masse* from their homeland, a classic technique for the eradication of

popular resistance. Indeed, the sequence along the scale of ruthlessness is unmistakable: Soviet methods under Stalin were the most brutal and most effective in curbing resistance, while liberal Russia of the 1990s proved to be the least brutal and least effective, with Putin's authoritarian Russia constituting an intermediate case. The same logic applies to China, whose continued successful suppression of Tibetan and Moslem nationalism is likely to persist so long as China retains its non-democratic regime, albeit with inferior effectiveness compared to Mao's totalitarian standards.

This is not to say that the democracies' conduct has been saintly—far from it. Atrocities, tacitly sanctioned by political and military authorities or carried out unauthorized by the troops, have regularly been committed against both combatants and non-combatants. All the same, strict restrictions on the use of violence against civilians constitute the legal and normative standard for liberal democracies. And although many, probably most, violations of this standard remain unreported, those incidents that have been exposed in open societies with free media are met with public condemnation and judicial procedures. All these developments radically limit the liberal democracies' powers of suppression, judged by historical and comparative standards. That not only a massacre such as that of My Lai but also the terror and intimidation practices at Abu Ghraib now evoke the most resounding outcry is an illustration of the continuous rise in the standards of conduct that liberal democracies apply to themselves.

The above should not be interpreted to mean that democracies *always* lose counter-insurgency wars, while non-democracies *always* win. Democracies can moderately succeed when they are able to isolate the insurgents from the civilian population and when pressed to the wall, but overall they find dealing with insurgencies highly problematic. Weak authoritarian regimes have sometimes failed in counter-insurgency conflicts because of their weakness, but strong authoritarian regimes and especially totalitarian ones rarely fail. Other factors are surely involved in each particular case, but the record is heavily tilted against democracies in such struggles.

Thus, although the military forces and civilian infrastructure of developed democracies' weak rivals are vulnerable to crippling blows in case of war, the weaker party may switch to irregular warfare and take cover within a friendly civilian environment, exploiting the liberal democracies' self-imposed limitations on ruthlessness against civilians. It may thereby frustrate or even deter invasion and occupation. In consequence, the democracies face a paradoxical predicament in many small wars: while sacrificing military capability and even victory for humanitarian considerations, they still face a heightened outcry both at home and abroad concerning alleged atrocities, the killing of civilians, and collateral damage that, while regrettable and partly avoidable, are often trifles by the standards of non-democratic powers; and as they are unable to win under such conditions, their mounting costs and their casualties—though

sometimes inconsequential, historically and comparatively—become the cause for national trauma. While this syndrome is stronger in morally disputed wars, such as those taking place in colonial settings, it also exists when the cause is broadly viewed as one of self-defence and even in humanitarian interventions.

There is a catch that lies at the root of affluent liberal democracies' torment in conflict situations. Since wars are abhorred in liberal societies as antithetical to both their interests and values, to their entire way of life and worldview, they are sanctioned only as a last resort—after all other options have failed. Yet in practically no situation does it ever become clear that all alternative policies have indeed been exhausted, and that war has really become unavoidable. A feeling that there may be another way, that there *must* be another way, always lingers on. Errors of omission or commission are ever suspected as being the cause of undesired belligerency. Moreover, it never becomes clear that the democracies come to a conflict with entirely clean hands, morally, because of past or more immediate alleged wrongs; nor indeed can they, given the inevitable gap that always separates ideals from reality.

The democracies' reaction to the Axis challenge during the 1930s amply epitomizes this predilection. Everything was done to avoid military action, even if this meant allowing Germany to regain its power, grow in confidence owing to the democracies' inaction, and cross the point of no return on its road to expansion. The democracies' feelings of guilt for not having treated Germany in good faith after the First World War contributed to their paralysis. As long as the prospect of peaceful accommodation and containment remained—and it hardly ever faded, not even in 1939—there was no way the democracies would have initiated armed confrontation. To be sure, as critics caution, Hitlers are rare and not every crisis is the 1930s. All the same, the 1930s are a standing reminder that the democracies' strong aversion to war, while immensely beneficial overall, can become a grave problem in serious conflict situations.

It is often said that the democracies' inhibitions and self-imposed constraints are a source of moral strength that, when all else fails and war erupts, galvanizes their resolve and helps them gain the upper hand. Although there is truth in this view, it is more than a touch idealized. It largely rests on heroic Second World War images, when in reality the Axis powers fought, if anything, more tenaciously than the democracies, and it was the United States' superior size and strength that decided the issue (in coalition with a supremely tenacious Soviet Union), rescuing the democracies from their potentially fatal initial blunders and setbacks. Moreover, since the Second World War, the pacification of the democracies has advanced much more, on account of growing liberalism and affluence.

This should not be interpreted as a moral-political criticism or call for change. My aim is descriptive. What I am suggesting is that the liberal democracies' attitude to, and conduct in, war is thoroughly imbedded in the

democracies' overall make-up and outlook, and is deeply structural. They correspond to the general parameters within which liberal society thinks and works, that might be challenged but not radically altered. There are variations, of course, arising from the particular historical-cultural and geopolitical conditions characterizing the various democracies—the United States, Europe, Japan, India, and other democracies. Yet, for better or for worse, underlying similarities have given rise to a typically 'liberal democratic way' in conflict.

Torn between their threat perceptions on the one hand and their fundamental view of conflict and war as harmful and deeply at variance with the modern world, high quality of life, hope for mutually rewarding international cooperation and peaceful accommodation, humanitarian universalism, and sense of self-guilt on the other, the liberal democracies are likely to find a revival of great power conflicts deeply agonizing. In forming policy in such circumstances, they are likely to adopt patterns of action they recurrently pursued in the twentieth century's great conflicts, successively against Imperial and Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and the Soviet Union; that is, they are likely to vacillate between isolationism, appeasement, containment, and cold war—progressing most reluctantly up the ladder if they sense that this cannot be helped, and down whenever deemed possible.<sup>10</sup> In military confrontations with smaller rivals, the democracies will tend to prefer war by proxy, blockade, naval and aerial actions, and limited operations by technologically superior strike forces. Large-scale ground operations, where the risk of messy entanglements is high and casualties might be greater, will tend to be avoided as much as possible. Because of far-reaching global commitments and citizens' unwillingness to enlist in the military, the democracies are likely to continue their shift towards professional forces. However, ever-growing sensitivity decreases liberal democracies' tolerance of casualties among professional troops as well.

Legal and normative constraints on the conduct of war, 'lawfare', are gaining in potency in liberal societies and their international institutional offshoots. An older view of war as a clash between national collectives, mobilized societies, and conflicting communal wills is increasingly giving way to a view of the enemy population as detached from its political leadership and as possessing rights of immunity from collective pressure. These rights are often interpreted as covering not only civilian life but also civilian well-being and dual-function civilian-strategic infrastructures.<sup>11</sup> A demand for greater reliance on non-lethal weapons even against combatants may lie in the future.

I intend no scaremongering or alarmism. The liberal democracies are likely to remain prosperous and powerful. Potential great power conflict need not necessarily materialize most of the time. Mutually beneficial international economic relations may continue to grow. At the same time, however, there are also contravening forces at work. An economically developed liberal democratic world, if it were to materialize, promises to be pacific. But we have not reached that point yet. Future developments are less secure than they

were deemed to be in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. The democracies' special practices and qualms about conflict dominate the discourse on war and accentuate the feeling of change—yet they are far from being shared by all.

## TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

Global developments in technology, and their military applications, constitute a third source for the feeling that war is undergoing change. Major technological transformations have taken place in both the conventional and unconventional realms of warfare. I start with the conventional, where the change is most widely known as the 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA). The problem with this label is that it tells us nothing about the nature of the revolution and, indeed, fails to place the current revolution in the broader context of earlier technology-driven revolutions of the industrial-technological age. For as military theorist J. F. C. Fuller saw, ever since the beginning of that era, the advances in military technology have been closely related to the vastly accelerated pulse of technological development in general.<sup>12</sup>

Fuller identified three such major revolutionary waves of civil-military technological change during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the so-called first industrial revolution, the application of the steam engine to railroads revolutionized the strategic mobility and logistics of armies, while its adoption at sea transformed naval architecture and warfare. To these was added the revolution in information communications, as electric telegraph lines connected armies across countries and naval bases across oceans and between continents in real time. Simultaneously during the nineteenth century, the revolution in metallurgy and machine tools transformed firearms and tactics. Rifling, breech loading, and rapid firing followed each other in quick succession.

From the 1880s, a new revolutionary wave of industrial technology, the so-called second industrial revolution, was beginning to unravel in civilian life, affecting the military field as profoundly as the first industrial revolution had. Chemicals, electric power, and the internal combustion engine dominated that second revolutionary wave. The chemical industry contributed high explosives and chemical warfare, and developments in electricity also had numerous military applications, including radio communication. But it was the internal combustion engine that affected war the most decisively. Lighter and more flexible than the steam engine, the internal combustion engine made possible cross-country mobility, away from railways. The appearance of the tractor and automobile was followed during the First World War by the tank, extending mechanized mobility into the battlefield.

The radio similarly extended real-time information transmission to the battlefield, away from stationary telegraph lines. Simultaneously, the internal combustion engine made possible mechanized air flight, while dual propulsion with the electric engine inaugurated the submarine. All these innovations were pioneered around 1900, made their military debut during the First World War, and matured to dominate warfare completely by the Second World War.

By then, new technological breakthroughs were beginning to make their mark in other sectors, most notably electronics, again revolutionizing both civilian life and war in the so-called third industrial or information revolution. Radar, developed in the late 1930s, deeply affected air, air-land, and sea warfare in the following decades. From around 1970, electro-optic, television, and laser guidance for missile weapon systems began to revolutionize air-land and land battle. Since then, fast improving sensors of all sorts, in combination with electronic computation capacity that more or less doubled every eighteen months, have made the identification, acquisition, and destruction of most hardware targets almost a foregone conclusion, nearly irrespective of range. Showing little signs of levelling off, the electronic revolution is bringing about increasing automation—the electric-robotic warfare that the pioneering Fuller predicted as early as 1928 as the third great wave after mechanization.<sup>13</sup>

The far-reaching effects of the ongoing electronic-information revolution on warfare have been endlessly discussed. The old mechanized-armoured armies of the previous era may not be disappearing, but they have been shrinking in size and transformed to embrace electronic warfare themselves, defensively as well as offensively. The two Gulf wars demonstrated this most strikingly, for the Iraqi side that lacked the new technologies found out to its cost that its numerous old-style formations were as vulnerable as herds of prehistoric mammoths. The gap between developed and less-developed protagonists seems to have widened considerably. And yet, the latter have been adjusting quicker and in ways different from expected. In the first place, less-developed players have been moving to get rid of their heavy formations, adopting instead low-signature troops, weapons, and tactics. (Notably, though, they cannot dispense of their heavy civilian infrastructure that remains highly vulnerable, as Serbia's experience in the Kosovo war demonstrated.) Second, the massive market penetration of new technologies into every aspect of daily life makes them available to less-developed players as well, if not in the form of the most expensive cutting-edge military systems, then as widely available and cheap gadgets. Satellite navigation systems (GPS) that offer precision guidance, computer networks that can be exploited and disrupted, and cellular phones that can be activated from afar are some examples. Indeed, high-tech technologies have both polarized *and* democratized the balance between the more and less advanced sides in war, for the means to generate massive damage with pinpoint accuracy have been trickling down to below the state level, becoming

available to non-state actors as well. This trickling-down effect may be even greater in the field of unconventional weapons, to which I now turn.

The mega terror attacks of 11 September 2001 constitute a landmark in history, not so much in their direct and indirect consequences but in demonstrating an ominous potential that had been building for some time and is yet fully to unravel. This is the threat of unconventional terror, employing the so-called weapons of mass destruction (WMD): nuclear, biological, and chemical. In part, the change here is driven by technological innovation but, even more, it is generated by technological proliferation.

Terror is neither entirely new nor as old as many believe it to be.<sup>14</sup> While the assassination of leaders is as old as humanity, terror only emerged from the late nineteenth century, riding on the back of modern technological and social developments: high explosives and later automatic weapons gave individuals and small groups the ability to cause damage disproportionate to their numbers; trains and later cars gave them mobility across countries; telegraph communication and popular newspapers gave their operations national publicity and resonance that vastly magnified the public 'terror' effect of what after all constituted very limited actions.

Again, it has been mainly liberal and old-style authoritarian countries that proved to be the most susceptible to terror. Totalitarian regimes not only policed far more effectively but also denied terror the publicity that was essential for its success. From the 1960s, terror exhibited a new surge as passenger jets offered both much greater global mobility and vulnerable targets, and as television further enhanced the terrorists' public exposure. Yet it is only the prospect of terrorists acquiring and using WMD that has turned terrorism from an irritant and a media-political tool into a serious destructive threat, thereby producing the alarming twist of the new era.

The so-called WMD are an assortment of different technologies with widely diverging potencies. Chemical weapons, pioneered in the First World War, were almost immediately countered by defensive gear, which when available sharply decreased their effectiveness. The potential use of chemical weapons by terrorists is predicated on the element of surprise, catching masses of people unprotected in open urban space. However, the bulk of the chemical agents needed and the problem of disseminating them effectively make chemical weapons the least dangerous of the WMD, with lethality from a highly successful chemical terror attack estimated in the thousands.

Biological weapons pose a threat of a much greater magnitude. The revolutionary breakthroughs achieved during recent decades in the decipherment of the genome, in biotechnology, and in genetic engineering make this field the next big thing in technological development, opening up new horizons in terms of lethality and accessibility. A virulent laboratory-cultivated strain of bacteria or virus, let alone a specially engineered 'superbug' against which no immunization and medication exist,<sup>15</sup> might bring the lethality of biological

weapons within the range of nuclear attacks and result in anything between thousands and many millions of fatalities, while being far more easily accessible to terrorists than nuclear weapons.

Still, nuclear weapons constitute a category of their own that sets them apart from all other known weapons. In the absence of effective defence, mutual deterrence is the only protection against them. Yet, precisely here lies the bewildering nature of the new mix which is unconventional terror, because deterrence is infinitely less effective against terrorist groups than it is against states. Not only are such groups more likely to consist of zealots who are willing to sacrifice their lives and may positively desire a general apocalypse; they are also too elusive to offer a clear enough target for retaliation, on which the whole concept of deterrence is based.

The root of the problem is the trickling down to below the state level of the technologies and materials of WMD. The relatively simple technological infrastructure needed to manufacture chemical weapons is now available in some 100 countries.<sup>16</sup> The biotechnological sector in particular constitutes one of the spearheads of today's scientific-commercial revolutionary wave. In the United States alone, the number of scientists authorized to work with biological agents has sharply risen to 15,000, rendering monitoring by government agencies all the more difficult.<sup>17</sup> As markets and communications globalize rapidly, the acquisition of the materials and know-how required for WMD has become both far easier and more difficult to detect and block. Finally, the disintegration of the Soviet Union left in the debris of its advanced military infrastructure unemployed scientists, poorly guarded production facilities, unaccounted-for materials, and, most troubling of all, the weapons themselves. For these reasons, terrorists' ability to buy, steal, rob, and/or manufacture WMD has increased dramatically.

To be sure, the practical difficulties facing terrorist groups aspiring to pursue the unconventional path are still considerable. In the early 1990s, the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan was the first non-state group to build production facilities for biological and chemical weapons. It failed in its early attempts to produce potent biological agents, while even its largest chemical attack, in the Tokyo subway in 1995, resulted in only twelve fatalities, mainly because of the low quality of the sarin used and a primitive dissemination mechanism (plastic bags punctured by umbrellas). All the same, the cult was making rapid progress when the police closed in on its facilities: it was in the process of producing more effective spraying mechanisms and 70 tons of sarin, while also building a large biological laboratory.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, technological capability and accessibility have increased considerably since the 1990s.

Similarly, the anthrax attack in the United States in the wake of 11 September, now attributed to Bruce Ivins, a scientist in the US biological warfare laboratory who committed suicide in 2008, was delivered in envelopes sent through the US postal service, killing only five people. While Ivins seems

to have been mentally disturbed and his motives remain unclear, he probably did not want to perpetrate mass death. However, the use of aerosolized anthrax effectively sprayed could result in a disaster of an entirely different order of magnitude. According to a congressional assessment made as early as 1993, a light aircraft flying over Washington DC spraying the city with 100 kilograms of anthrax could fatally injure 3 million people.

Nuclear weapons have not yet been used by terrorists, and, in contrast to chemical and biological agents, fissile material is not within the realm of their production capabilities, at least not in the foreseeable future. All the same, stolen or bought materials can be used by terrorists to create a radioactive bomb, which does not compare with nuclear weapons in terms of destructiveness but can still contaminate entire urban blocs. Furthermore, according to several tests carried out by scientists for the American authorities, a nuclear bomb can be built from parts available in the open market, with the fissile material bought or stolen. Nuclear weapons themselves might be stolen or bought in the black market, and not at a high cost. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani nuclear scientist who headed his country's nuclear programme, sold the nuclear secrets to perhaps a dozen countries, reportedly for as little as millions or tens of millions dollars in each case.

For much of history, non-state players, such as tribal and armed gang leaders, often challenged the state successfully. With modernity, the state gained dominance as it effectively came to control the heavy infrastructure that increasingly underlay power. Although state dominance still holds, despite encroachments from various directions, the 'encapsulation' of destructive power in WMD, particularly the nuclear and biological, recreates a situation whereby one no longer has to be big in order to deliver a heavy punch. Scenarios of world-threatening individuals and organizations, previously reserved to fiction of the James Bond genre, suddenly become real. The notion of 'a bomb in the basement', originally coined in relation to states' undeclared development of nuclear weapons, assumes a new and chilling meaning. Indeed, because deterrence based on mutual assured destruction (MAD) does not apply to terrorists, the use of ultimate weapons is *more* likely to come from them than it is from states, even though the latter may possess far greater capability. In contrast to the mindset that has dominated strategic thinking since the onset of the nuclear age, unconventional capability acquired by terrorists is *useable*.

It has been claimed by some in the wake of 11 September that it is wrong to define terror as the enemy, because terror is only a tactic, whereas the enemy is militant Islam. True, radical Islam stands behind most terrorist attacks in today's world, and dealing with it is an intricate and complex problem. Yet even if this problem were overcome, other causes and 'Super-Empowered Angry Men' (as the *New York Times* journalist Thomas Freedman has called them) would always be present and, in contrast to the past, could now make themselves felt in horrendous ways. The Aum Shinrikyo cult, anthrax scientist

Bruce Ivins, and, indeed, the Christian millenarians and extreme right-wing perpetrators of the massive conventional bombings in Oklahoma City (1995) and the Atlanta Olympics (1996) were not Muslim. Thus, unconventional terror *is* the problem.

Indeed, this is a baffling problem, which does not lend itself to easy or clear solutions. The main feasible measure against unconventional terror is a coordinated global crackdown, which includes tightened security measures, tougher controls on the materials and facilities for the production of WMD, and a relentless pursuit of terrorists, including highly controversial foreign interventions. Despite much haggling and conflicts of interest, such concerted action is not wholly utopian, for no state is immune to the threat. International norms and international law are likely to change in response to the new challenges, most notably perhaps with respect to the concept of sovereignty.<sup>19</sup>

The greatest obstacle for the success of a policy of global crackdown is the proliferation of WMD, above all nuclear weapons. A number of scholars have argued that the spread of nuclear weapons actually constitutes a good thing, because it will expand to other regions of the world the same deterrence against war that prevailed between the blocs during the Cold War. However, critics of this view question whether the logic of MAD is full-proof as nuclear weapons reach a growing number of hands in less and less stable parts of the world. Furthermore, critics point out that as undeveloped countries with inferior technological and institutional infrastructures increasingly come to possess nuclear capabilities, the likelihood of an accidental use of nuclear weapons or of a nuclear accident will increase considerably.<sup>20</sup> Finally, with respect to terrorists, the greatest threat of nuclear proliferation into countries with low security standards and high levels of corruption is the much-increased danger of leakage. Not only, as happened in the Pakistani case, might people and organizations with access to nuclear facilities sell or otherwise transfer nuclear materials, expertise, and even weapons to terrorists, with or without the knowledge of their governments, but also states in the less developed and unstable parts of the world are ever in danger of disintegration and anarchy. When state authority collapses and anarchy takes hold, who is to guarantee the country's nuclear arsenal? The collapsed Soviet Union rather than the former nuclear superpower may be the model for future threats.

Thus, defunct states may constitute an even greater problem than militant ones. Weak or 'failed' states simply do not exercise effective control over their territory and cannot be held accountable. In vast and barely approachable tracts of the globe inhabited by fragmented and unruly societies, the ability to monitor and crack down on the activity of terrorist groups is inherently limited. The difficulties of finding a needle in a haystack pale in comparison.

The disproportion between the terrorists' material investment and that required by states to counter them is so great that it is viewed as absurd by some critics. Some have come close to suggesting that the United States should

drop its highly expensive countermeasures and take its chances with the prospect of a biological or nuclear terror action which they anyway consider to be remote.<sup>21</sup> Quite apart from the stupendous cost of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States spent \$57 billion on bioterrorism defences alone between 2001 and 2008. This included the development and stockpiling of drugs, hospital preparations, and the installation of detection stations along the perimeters of thirty-five major cities—and the effect is still judged to be insufficient in view of the increasing threat.<sup>22</sup>

The normative–legal aspects of the democracies’ defensive measures are equally problematic. The expansion of the state’s authority in such spheres as the detainment of suspects by means of extraordinary legal procedures, debriefing methods, surveillance of people and communication, and other infringements of privacy is hotly debated and litigated in the liberal democracies. As with the offensive and pre-emptive elements of the ‘war on terror’, the debate within the democracies assumes a bitterly ideological and righteous character. Indeed, all the above measures are deeply problematic for them. And yet, the threat of unconventional terrorism is real, is here to stay, and offers no easy solutions.

## CONCLUSION

A view from a longer perspective on the apparent transformation of war in today’s world reveals a complex causal web, in which the continuation and deepening of older processes blend with the effects of more recent changes that may themselves be partly transitory. In large part, the perception of change derives from the apparent disappearance of great power conflict with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. But great power war has been growing increasingly rare since the beginning of the industrial–technological age, becoming even less likely in the nuclear age. At the same time, the return of capitalist non-democratic great powers, above all China and also Russia, may result in the resumption of at least some level of great power tensions and rivalry. Democracies have exhibited unique conflict behaviour from the later part of the nineteenth century. But democracies’ inhibitions in using forceful suppression, their low casualty tolerance, and conflict aversion in general have all grown ever deeper the more liberal, democratic, and affluent they have become, and the more they have increased in number and their norms have grown to dominate the global discourse and international institutions. How long this dominance will last is yet to be seen. As with earlier technological revolutions, today’s electronic revolution initially magnified the advantage of developed militaries. Yet, some catching up and adjustment by the less developed have ensued. In part, terror has risen on the

scale of threats simply because great power conflict has receded, at least for a while. At the same time, although the world has been living with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons for generations, the continued proliferation of the technologies in question, as well as the revolutionary advances in biotechnology, renders unconventional terror a far more likely prospect.

Proverbially, predictions are just fine as long as they are not applied to the *future*. Much that is unpredicted and unpredictable can and will occur. And yet, people must prepare for the future the best they can, and they can only do so by extrapolating from past experience. The character of war is certainly changing, but our strong perception of change stems from the coming together of several, partly related and partly unrelated, trends that may develop in different directions over time. Indeed, only time will tell.

## NOTES

1. Melvin Small and David Singer, *Resort to arms: International and civil wars, 1816–1980* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982), based on their important Correlates of War database, gives no basis for comparison to earlier times and between developed and developing countries. But see Jack Levy, *War in the modern great power system, 1495–1975* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), esp. 112–49, which concentrates on the great powers' wars among themselves, that is, by definition, the major wars by the most advanced states. Also Evan Luard, *War in international society* (London: Tauris, 1986), 53, 67.
2. For more detail, see my *War in human civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 524–9, 534f.
3. These are my rough calculations based on the estimated data. The most comprehensive and update estimates are Angus Maddison, *The world economy: A millennial perspective* (Paris: OECD, 2001), 28, 90, 126, 183–6, 264f. See also Paul Bairoch, 'Europe's gross national product: 1800–1975', *Journal of European Economic History*, 5/2 (1976), 301; and Idem., 'International industrialization levels from 1750 to 1980', *Journal of European Economic History*, 11/2 (1982), esp. 275, 284, 286; W. W. Rostow, *The world economy: History & prospect* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1978), 4–7, 48f.
4. E.g. Richard Rosecrance, *The rise of the trading state: Commerce and conquest in the modern world* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); also, Stephen Brooks, 'The globalization of production and the changing benefits of conquest', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43/5 (1999), 646–70.
5. Calculated on the basis of the data in B. R. Mitchell, *International historical statistics, Europe 1750–1988* (New York: Stockton, 1992), 553–62; Maddison, *The world economy*, 126f., 184; Simon Kuznets, *Modern economic growth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 306f., 312–14.
6. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of political economy* (New York: Kelley, 1961), book III, 582.

7. Cf. Kalevi Holsti, *Peace and war: Armed conflict and international order 1648–198* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 139–45.
8. Azar Gat, ‘The return of authoritarian great powers’, *Foreign Affairs*, 86/4 (2007), 59–69; Idem., *Victorious and vulnerable: Why democracy won in the 20th century and how it is still imperiled* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield for the Hoover Institution, 2008).
9. See originally: Gil Merom, *How democracies lose small wars: State, society, and the failure of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a greater elaboration of the thesis, and more bibliographical references, see Merom and Gat, ‘Why counterinsurgencies fail’ in Gat, *Victorious and Vulnerable*, Chapter 7.
10. Gat, *War in human civilization*, 609–18.
11. A full acceptance of such a doctrine wholly negates nuclear deterrence, and there is no known defence against a wholesale nuclear attack other than deterrence through mutual assured destruction (MAD). For a discussion of the irreconcilable moral dilemmas here, see: Michael Walzer, *Just and unjust war* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), Chapter 17.
12. These ideas repeatedly occur in J. F. C. Fuller’s voluminous writings; but see esp. his *On future warfare* (London: Praed, 1928); and Idem., *Armament and history* (London: Eyre, 1946).
13. J. F. C. Fuller, *Towards armageddon* (London: Dickson, 1937), 92, 132.
14. See, for example, Walter Laqueur’s otherwise excellent, *The new terrorism: Fanaticism and the arms of mass destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8–12.
15. Philip Cohen, ‘A terrifying power’, *New Scientist*, 30 January 1999, 10; Rachel Nowak, ‘Disaster in the making’, *New Scientist*, 13 January 2001, 4–5; Carina Dennis, ‘The bugs of war’, *Nature*, 17 May 2001, 232–5.
16. Michael Moodie, ‘The chemical weapons threat’, in Sidney D. Drell, Abraham D. Sofaer, and George D. Wilson (eds.), *The new terror: Facing the threat of biological and chemical weapons* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press for the Hoover Institution, 1999), 19.
17. Spencer Hsu, ‘Modest gains against ever-present bioterrorism threat’, *Washington Post*, 3 August 2008.
18. David Kaplan, ‘Aum Shinrikyo’, in Jonathan B. Tucker (ed.), *Toxic terror: Assessing terrorist use of chemical and biological weapons* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), Chapter 12.
19. Graham Allison, *Nuclear terrorism: The ultimate preventable catastrophe* (New York: Times, 2004) is a proposed blueprint for such a strategy. More generally, Philip Bobbitt, *The shield of Achilles: War, peace and the course of history* (London: Allen Lane, 2002); Idem., *Terror and consent: The wars for the twenty-first century* (New York: Knopf, 2008).
20. See, for example, Scott Sagan (against) and Kenneth Waltz (for), *The spread of nuclear weapons* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); references to terrorist nuclear threat have been added in the second edition. (2003), 126–30, 159–66. Also, Martin van Creveld, *Nuclear proliferation and the future of conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1993) (for); and a good balanced treatment by Devin Hagerly, *The consequences of nuclear proliferation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

21. John Mueller, *Overblown: How politicians and the terrorism industry inflate national security threats and why we believe them* (New York: Free Press, 2006) is a provocative corrective to the threat perception, emphasizing the difficulties of generating unconventional terror, the small number of casualties so far compared to other sources of mortality, and the counter-effectiveness of many of the measures employed. But it is spoiled by the author's one-sided depreciation of the threat and his bizarre suggestions that the United State's involvement in the Second World War and the Cold War was equally unnecessary: the United States should not have gone to war after Pearl Harbor but rather should have stuck to economic sanctions and containment that would have brought down Japan (how, after the latter had conquered east Asia, thereby becoming self-sufficient, is unclear); nor should it have opposed Soviet expansion, because the failed Soviet system was doomed anyhow.
22. Hsu, 'Modest gains'.