

## Chapter 2

# STRATEGY, POLITICS, ETHICS

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Although this chapter is fundamental, its content is neither basic nor familiar. Because everyone agrees that military power is instrumental for, and therefore subordinate to, politics, and also that ethics should be important to statecraft and strategy, the subjects of this discussion ought to be already well mapped. In practice, nothing could be further from the truth. The vocation of a strategist is not well appreciated; the relationship between politics and war is not clearly delineated. Furthermore, the role of ethics in the bridge of strategy between politics and war, though much discussed, is rarely considered from a strategically prudential standpoint.

The strategic history of the twentieth century illustrates the master theme of this book all too clearly. Politically and ethically viewed, strategy and war do not alter significantly from period to period. This chapter probes the qualities desirable in a strategist, and finds them to be broad rather than narrow. The discussion pursues a thread of modern criticism of Clausewitz and explores the possibility that politics, or policy, in Clausewitz's sense, has had a historically limited writ—perhaps from 1648 to 1945 (or 1989)—only to find the suggestion without merit.<sup>1</sup> Policy and strategy are judged here to be eternal phenomena, albeit with some sharply different characteristics on both sides of the means–ends equation over the centuries.

Even though the Clausewitzian approach to war, strategy, and politics is judged sound, this analysis is not content with the view that 'war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means'.<sup>2</sup> The undoubted truth in that Clausewitzian dictum today is all but overwhelmed by the need to record caveats. No matter how neatly Clausewitz appears to dispatch the potential difficulties in policy–war relations, modern history alerts us to the problems that arise over policy guidance for strategy. Recognition of that inescapable fact leads the discussion into the troubled waters of the relations between politics and war, or between policy and policy instrument. Again the point is developed that one reason why strategy is so difficult to do well is because it requires expert two-way translation between the realms and currencies of the politician and the warrior.

The chapter moves from a focus upon politics and strategy to consider how, or

<sup>1</sup> Martin van Creveld, 'What Is Wrong with Clausewitz?', in Gert de Nooy (ed.), *The Clausewitzian Dictum and the Future of Western Military Strategy* (The Hague, 1997), 7–23, is an impressive, if ultimately unpersuasive, critique.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ, 1976), 605.

indeed if, ethics affect strategic behaviour. The argument suggests that, for all the theoretical complexity of ethical considerations, in practice modern strategy has scarcely been troubled by matters of conscience. Also, the text notices that, far from recording moral improvement in man's behaviour towards man, the strategic history of the twentieth century has shown, if anything, a 'return to barbarism'. I note that crimes against humanity—judged so both legally and morally—have increased approximately, though of course only incidentally, in parallel with the burgeoning of the 'war convention' that should constrain human beastliness. Ethical influences upon behaviour are internalized and learnt socially as a part of political and strategic culture. Furthermore, national culture tends overwhelmingly to prove superior in leverage to the writ of potentially contrasting application of ethical principles. Security communities persuade themselves with scant difficulty that what they believe they need to do is always right enough.

With respect to the broad questions that guide this entire enquiry, Chapter 2 provides answers on the relationship between theory and practice that are not encouraging for those who expect progress in the human condition. Ethical ideas are regularly drilled into line with what are believed to be the prudent needs of states. The moral of this chapter, perhaps, is that we learn from history both that we cannot learn from history and that human beings continue to be literally capable of anything. The sadness of strategic history that sparks sentimental popular songs with rhetorical lines such as 'when will they ever learn?' promotes the hard-nosed question, 'learn what?' The horror of war has been known to mankind for ever. If full recognition of that horror were all that we humans had to learn, then the social institution of war might have been long banished. Unfortunately, things are not quite that elementally simple.

## STRATEGISTS

With characteristic wit and literary felicity, Fred Charles Iklé observes that 'strategy is not a vocation for stunted minds'.<sup>3</sup> That wise judgement merits expansion with the complementary thought that strategy should not be a vocation for stunted consciences. He proceeds to advise:

To do good work on national strategy almost demands a rotund intellect, a well-rounded personality. He whose vocation it is to work on these issues of war and peace cannot suffer from intellectual poverty. His soul must be in harmony with this world of ours. He must not only appreciate different cultures and good art, but also find nourishment in things that are beautiful and be endowed with a sense of humor. He might have, perhaps, an eye for architecture or painting, an ear for the best music; he must have a broad understanding of

<sup>3</sup> Fred Charles Iklé, 'The Role of Character and Intellect in Strategy', in Andrew W. Marshall, J. J. Martin, and Henry S. Rowen (eds.), *On Not Confusing Ourselves: Essays on National Security Strategy in Honor of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter* (Boulder, Colo., 1991), 315.

philosophy, literature, and, of course, history. And—why not?—let me have men about me that are sophisticated epicures.<sup>4</sup>

Iklé is writing in praise of the co-doyen of modern American strategic studies, Albert Wohlstetter (his adversary-partner and co-doyen was Bernard Brodie). Whether or not Wohlstetter fitted Iklé's mould of Renaissance Person with strategic interests, the mould errs on the side of accuracy in requiring a whole, balanced human being as an exemplary strategist, rather than a narrowly military professional or a 'cybernerd' whose strategic vision is blinded by the glow of a computer monitor's screen. General Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, for example, was about as far removed from Iklé's idea of the 'rotund intellect' as one could imagine.<sup>5</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, in sharp contrast, was a person with inclinations, interests, and accomplishments that at least approached the ideal specified by Iklé.<sup>6</sup> The good strategist requires a breadth of mind that does not compromise depth on those subjects that demand no less than expert mastery if they are to be treated competently.

Who is a strategist? In theory, at least, each polity or coalition can have only one strategist. If strategy is, as Clausewitz insists, 'the use of engagements for the object of the war',<sup>7</sup> each belligerent can afford only one person, institution, or process, acting as strategy-maker. Strategy abhors a vacuum: if the strategic function is lacking, strategic effect will be generated by the casual cumulation of tactical and operational outcomes. Germany in World War I is the classic example in the twentieth century of an appalling lack of purposive strategic grip upon a conflict. US performance in Vietnam from 1965 to 1973 appears a close rival for poor strategic direction.<sup>8</sup>

German military—one should not dignify it with the description 'strategic'—planning in the quarter-century preceding *der Tag* on 1 August 1914, and performance in the world war itself instructs by negative example on the nature of a truly strategic outlook.<sup>9</sup> The Germans were without equal in the grim trade of fighting, but they were fatally weak in the waging of war. The reason is not hard to find, at least for the Wilhelmine period. Germany's limited succession of 'strategists' was allowed by German statecraft to approach its task as a mindlessly literal applica-

<sup>4</sup> Fred Charles Iklé, 'The Role of Character and Intellect in Strategy', in Andrew W. Marshall, J. J. Martin, and Henry S. Rowen (eds.), *On Not Confusing Ourselves: Essays on National Security Strategy in Honor of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter* (Boulder, Colo., 1991), 315.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Graf von Schlieffen has been described by Gordon A. Craig as a 'pure technician': *Germany, 1866-1945* (New York, 1978), 316. See Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning* (New York, 1991), ch. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (New York, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 128.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington, Ky., 1984), and John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1995), are particularly thought-provoking.

<sup>9</sup> Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen*; Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-18* (London, 1997).

tion of the Clausewitzian definition of strategy. Clausewitz's claim that strategy is 'the use of engagements for the object of the war' lends itself to encouragement of an unhealthy fixation upon the battlefield. Hew Strachan speaks convincingly for recent scholarship:

Admirers of German military prowess have to confront the conundrum that in the First World War, as in the Second, Germany lost. It did so because its definitions of strategy were too restricted for the scale of war that confronted it. The army made operational solutions do duty for problems that were as much economic as political.<sup>10</sup>

Much of the structure of the problem is explained by the familiar aphorism, 'where you stand depends on where you sit'. If a theatre military commander is allowed by lack of superior direction or pressing advice to control the country's war effort, he will deliver operational-level military solutions to the problems of the day. It is all too appropriate that Schlieffen should design his campaign plan against France upon the hope that tactical and operational success *somehow* would translate as a strategic victory.<sup>11</sup>

The principal German problem in both world wars was that the country lacked a competent strategy-making, and strategy-reviewing, body. In World War I, and in the immediate prewar decades, Germany did not have an effective institution located between the Kaiser as head of state (and nominally commander-in-chief) and the Chief of the General Staff to oversee strategy (there was a war minister, but his influence was unremarkable). If the Kaiser of the day is not a person with a broad grasp of statecraft, together with a mastery of the strengths and limitations of his military and naval instruments, or if he is unwilling to seek expert advice, then subsequent policymaking is likely to be narrowly conceived. The problem was bad enough at the turn of the century when there was perilously little to save Germany and Europe from the consequences of the relationship between Kaiser Wilhelm II and Schlieffen as Chief of the General Staff, but that problem was to grow still worse.

If it was difficult for strategic considerations to make other than a guest appearance in German statecraft early in the century, consider the impediments to superior strategic performance in Nazi Germany. The author of the vision of the Thousand-Year Reich was nothing if not long-term in his approach to statecraft. Moreover, unlike Kaiser Wilhelm, Adolf Hitler functioned as grand and military strategist. The problem was that the Führer was not competent as a strategist and he lacked that 'rotund intellect' to which Iklé refers. Above all else, after 1940

<sup>10</sup> Hew Strachan, 'Germany in the First World War: The Problem of Strategy', *German History*, 12 (1994), 249.

<sup>11</sup> Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen*, 156–7; id., *Hans Delbrück and the German Establishment* (Iowa City, 1985), 63–4 and Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (London, 1958), present the orthodox view of the so-called 'Schlieffen Plan'. Recently revealed archival sources show clearly that the Schlieffen Plan believed in by scholars for eighty years never existed. See Terence Zuber, 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered', *War in History*, 6 (1999), 262–305. Every book about 1914 will have to be rewritten!

Hitler lacked 'what the French call *le sens du praticable*, and we call common sense, knowledge of what is and what is not possible'.<sup>12</sup>

A person could easily lose his grip on strategic reality when in little more than a decade, apparently by an effort of will, he had transformed himself from the status of a marginal figure in German politics to being the ruler of most of Europe. On the evidence of 1933–40, Hitler believed that his will could dictate the course of history.<sup>13</sup> The malign effect of the belief that one is blessed by the gods (or by history, or whatever) has by no means been confined recently to the person of Adolf Hitler. US policy and military endeavour — one hesitates to say 'strategy' — in Vietnam in the mid-1960s, as with German policy in 1941–3, suffered fatally from the malady known as 'victory disease'. In strategy nothing fails like success, not only because enemies adapt to your methods,<sup>14</sup> but also because you become unduly persuaded of your genius or of the favour of the gods.

A strategist worthy of the name is a person who sees, even though he or she cannot possibly be expert in, all dimensions of the 'big picture' of the evolving conditions of war. Defence preparation and the conduct of war involve an array of resources, even though those resources are unlikely to be committed totally. Strategic expertise has to imply educated familiarity with each of the dimensions of war. Prominent among the several reasons why strategy is so difficult is the sheer diversity of subjects that the strategist must understand. More challenging still is understanding the complexity of the relationships among the dimensions. The strategist does not have to be an engineer, logistician, sociologist, moral philosopher, politician, or outstanding combat commander. But he does need to understand enough about each of those areas of specialization, and especially about their interrelationships, to be able to use, or advise on the use of, force as an instrument of policy. Quality of strategic performance must ever be at risk if, for example, the strategist is ignorant of logistical constraints, fails to provide field commanders capable of leading troops, or neglects to consider how apparent ethical weakness with regard either to *jus ad bellum* or to *jus in bello* reduces political support at home for a war, or morale among the soldiers themselves.

The strategist is not concerned *per se* with the military effectiveness of landpower, seapower, airpower, spacepower, or cyberpower. Rather, the strategist must orchestrate the threat and use of armed forces, in all geographical environments, across all dimensions, and in all character of conflicts. The job description for the strategist is exceedingly demanding. Even when national war colleges attempt to teach grand strategy, they are constrained by the fact that strategy is an art. By analogy, art schools teach technical competence, but they cannot teach

<sup>12</sup> Archibald Wavell, *Generals and Generalship* (New York, 1943), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler* (New York, 1975); Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler, and World War II* (Cambridge, 1995); Sebastian Haffner, *The Meaning of Hitler* (London, 1997); John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (New York, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987).

competent artists how to be great. Fortunately, countries have few employment opportunities for strategists, so the acute shortage in supply of strategic genius is typically less than fatal for national security performance. No less fortunately, competence in strategy is all that a country or coalition needs to achieve. After all, it is unlikely, though not impossible, that the enemy of the day will enjoy the services of an inspired strategist. Even a poor strategist may perform well enough, if the enemy is worse. Because the practical realm of strategy is a relational one, strictly the need is to do better than the foe. There is no requirement to perform elegantly.

It is precisely because a Marlborough or George Washington cannot be summoned reliably in time of dire national need, that genius is sought in the system of strategy-making and strategic execution rather than in the person of an outstanding strategist. War cabinets, general staffs, and chiefs of staff committees were invented to function as a surrogate for individual strategic genius. If the chief executive in an authoritarian polity believes himself to be a strategist of genius, then the institutional buffers of a general staff and other advisory bodies will be bypassed or, more likely, employed as passive administrative agents of the executive will.<sup>15</sup> Even genuine genius has its limitations: health, time, and focus, for example. By almost any method of assay, Napoleon Bonaparte ranks prominently among the most competent leaders in all of history.<sup>16</sup> The fact remains that Napoleon's long and bloody bid for dynastic empire failed catastrophically. As with assessment of the German bids for greater empire in this century, one is unsure whether to be amazed by the scope of the temporary success achieved or impressed by the fact of ultimate failure. A competent strategist, such as Frederick the Great of Prussia, balances means with ends and understands that lasting success requires the definition of an international order which erstwhile foes find

<sup>15</sup> Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945* (New York, 1953), chs. 12-16; Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-45*, repr. of 1962 edn. (Novato, Calif., n.d.); Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (eds.), *The Halder War Diary, 1939-1942*, abridged version of 1962-4 edn. (Novato, Calif., 1988). Admittedly, the story of 'Hitler and his generals' became an extreme case of absence of genuine dialogue after the near-catastrophe in Russia in December 1941 (see Horst Boog et al., *Germany and the Second World War, iv: The Attack on the Soviet Union* (Oxford, 1998), esp. 707-25). Even in the different context of a popular democracy with a mature policy- and strategy-making organization, a strong enough political will at the top shapes military advice and strategic decisions, regardless of professional military misgivings. Anglo-American history shows that over Suez in 1956, Vietnam in 1964-5, the Falklands in 1982, and Iraq in 1990-1, and Kosovo in 1999, the military instrument in a democracy did what it was told to do by determined political leaders, notwithstanding military reservations. For the Vietnam case, for example, see Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (Cambridge, 1996). For a classic case of the reverse phenomenon, of politicians lacking the moral courage to overrule overconfident generals, see David R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (Newark, Del., 1983); Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven, Conn., 1996). In 1917 Prime Minister Lloyd George failed Britain and the British Army by declining repeatedly to act on his conviction that Sir Douglas Haig's protracted offensive at Passchendaele was hurting the Allies more than it was damaging the Germans. Lloyd George knew what he should do, but he decided not to do it for fear of adverse domestic political consequences.

<sup>16</sup> Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 64.

tolerable. An incompetent strategist, such as Napoleon Bonaparte, fails to define and settle for such an order. Military victories, no matter how dazzling, tend to promote further cycles of war if they are not allowed to promote political outcomes acceptable to most interested polities.<sup>17</sup>

I use the label 'strategist' flexibly. Strictly speaking, the word should be reserved to describe a person who makes and 'executes' strategy. By 'executes' I mean the person or persons who direct either all the assets of a polity (grand strategy) or all the military assets of a polity (military strategy). In a Western state, the strategist function at its lesser military, rather than grand strategic, level is exercised by some combination of the following: a minister of defence; a chairman of a chiefs of staff committee; a chiefs of staff committee functioning collectively; and, an inner war cabinet or national security council chaired by the head of government (and possibly by the head of state).

It is expedient also from time to time to refer to strategists in the same sense in which it is commonplace to refer, say, to economists. Relatively few scholars of economics actually 'do' the economics at which they profess to be expert; instead, they theorize and advise. Economics and strategy share the property of being practical disciplines.<sup>18</sup> It can be ponderous to write constantly of strategic theorists rather than strategists. A strategist is both a person who 'does' strategy and a person who advises on the 'doing'. The former should not be confused with the sense in which strategy is 'done' tactically by tacticians. Strictly speaking, strategists do not 'do' any action; it is the military instrument that 'does' strategy at the operational and tactical levels of war.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, ever fewer theorists of strategy had 'done' strategy themselves in any sense other than strictly with brain, pen, and word-processor. This professional and sociological trend has had implications for problems in communication between the realms of theory and practice. Readers might care to consider the implications of J. F. Lazenby's concluding paragraph in his valuable study of Hannibal.

But, in the end, it is, perhaps, almost an impertinence for an armchair historian who has never experienced a battle, and never commanded anything more than a patrol of Scouts, to assess one of the great commanders of history, and Hannibal himself is said to have had little patience with amateur critics. According to Cicero (*de Oratore*, 2.75), the great general, when in exile in Ephesus, was once invited to attend a lecture by one Phormio, and after being treated to a lengthy discourse on the commander's art, was asked by his friends what he thought of it. 'I have seen many old drivellers', he replied, 'on more than one occasion, but I have seen no one who drivelled more than Phormio'. I cannot help but wonder what he would have thought of this book.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> These and related points are made superbly in Brian Bond, *The Pursuit of Victory: From Napoleon to Saddam Hussein* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Brodie, 'Strategy as a Science', *World Politics*, 1 (1949), 476-88.

<sup>19</sup> J. F. Lazenby, *Hannibal's War: A Military History of the Second Punic War* (Warminster, 1978), 257.

## POLITICS AND WAR

It is a cliché to assert that history is not a morality tale; but the cliché is partly wrong. The course and outcome of historical processes does provide shifting definition of a just international order—witness the change of opinion in this century over the legitimacy and justice of colonial rule by ‘civilized’ nations as imperial powers.<sup>20</sup> History’s winners, which means preeminently history’s strategic winners, are the ones who decide what is just and what is not. Justice is always an important concept; its exact meaning, however, is ever in contention on the playing-field of politics.

As Clausewitz appreciated so clearly, politics is what war is all about. Some recent commentators evince difficulty understanding what is political,<sup>21</sup> but such difficulty yields rapidly to common sense. Nonetheless, the concept of politics lends itself to sundry interpretations. Different cultures invest the idea of politics with distinctive emphases. In Greek, for example, the idea is dignified by its close linguistic association with the *polis*, or (city-)state. In English, ‘politics’ carries less elevated association and often refers to the process of struggle over the right, or authority, to govern the ‘body politic’, and hence decide on the distribution of civic burdens and rewards (‘who gets what, when, and how’).<sup>22</sup>

Politics produces policy which may require the services of strategy. Force distinguishes the realm of strategy, so organized violence is one key to a definition of war. The other, more contentious key to a satisfactory definition of war is the requirement that the violence be organized for political purposes.<sup>23</sup> Given that the dimensions of war and strategy look remarkably stable throughout history, it is wise to be relaxed about, and empathetic to, the exact meaning of ‘political’ over the centuries.

Politics, implying the processes that yield policy, and policy itself is the dominant reason for the reality of our subject. Modern strategy ultimately derives its significance from the realm of politics. If this is not true, what else was the strategic history of the twentieth century about? Although war and its strategic conduct is an economic activity, engages our moral judgement, and consists at its brutal core of combat of various kinds, war is not ‘about’ economics, morality, or fighting. Instead, it is about politics. Some modern critics of this notably Clausewitzian point question the historical authority of the claims for periods outside the bounds of the Westphalian western world of 1648 to 1945, or perhaps 1989. Some of the criticism of Clausewitz’s famous dictum about the instrumental relationship of war with political intercourse is rooted in a fundamental misreading of *On War*, especially with regard to Clausewitz’s conception of the ‘remarkable

<sup>20</sup> Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of ‘Civilization’ in International Society* (Oxford, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York, 1950).

<sup>23</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York, 1977), 184.



trinity' of violence, chance, and reason.<sup>24</sup> When simplified to correspond neatly with people, army, and government, Clausewitz's trinity can appear to be a framework with only limited historical writ.<sup>25</sup>

Warfare in medieval Europe frequently appeared to be about rights rather than what the modern world understands by state policy, but that apparent fact does not render such warfare any the less political, properly translated by an historically empathetic common sense. Similarly, after the Cold War a notable fraction of conflict is prosecuted by agents other than formally constituted governments. The Palestinian conduct of its *intifada*, or the terrorist campaigns of the Irish Republican Army (IRA)-Sinn Fein, are entirely as political as was US or Soviet conduct of the Cold War. War has been waged, strategy has been devised and implemented, and tactics have been 'done', for a host of diverse motives over the centuries. The explicit or implicit dialogue between war (and strategy) and 'politics' is permanent.

### PERILOUS ESSENTIALISM

Three problems shape the terms of the war-politics relationship. First, although there is truth in Clausewitz's assertion that 'war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means', the essentialism in the assertion obscures necessary qualifications. Security communities sometimes do resort to the organized violence that we define as war when other avenues appear less promising. Although some individuals enjoy fighting, some institutions anticipate benefit from hostilities, and the community as a whole finds the condition of war in some ways pleurably thrilling, the decision to fight will be political, intended by its immediate authors to yield net advantage to the polity. Clausewitz is right to identify war as a condition chosen for political reasons to advance political ends. Whether or not some individuals, groups, and institutions anticipate benefit of a non-political kind from a condition of belligerency may be interesting, but is not relevant to the merit in Clausewitz's argument.

Beyond the truth that war is waged, and strategy is effected, for political ends, lies the scarcely less basic truth that war, and hence much of the realm within which strategy seeks to be authoritative, is preeminently the zone of passion and of chance.<sup>26</sup> War, therefore, is an instrument of policy, but it is an instrument ever liable both to capture by feeling and to diversion and negation by what would

<sup>24</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York, 1991); id., *Nuclear Proliferation and the Future of Conflict* (New York, 1993), chs. 1-3; id., 'What Is Wrong with Clausewitz?'; Keegan, *History of Warfare*; id., *War and Our World* (London, 1998), ch. 3. Although van Creveld and Keegan both criticize Clausewitz, the former, unlike the latter, regards the Prussian 'apart perhaps from Sun Tzu, [as] by far the greatest writer on war of all times' ('What is wrong with Clausewitz?', 7).

<sup>25</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 89; Edward J. Villacres and Christopher Bassford, 'Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity', *Parameters*, 25 (1995), 9-19.

<sup>26</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 85, 101.

amount to bad luck. Clausewitz equated war with a game of cards.<sup>27</sup> The challenge is to see the world of war and strategy in the round, as did Clausewitz. It is necessary to recognize the politically instrumental nature of war, while also acknowledging the existence and influence of the reasons why even a deliberate decision to fight is akin to a roll of the dice.

### **POLITICAL OBJECTIVES CAN BE ELUSIVE**

Second, although there are many kinds of grit that create friction in the relationship between politics and strategy, by far the most pernicious is an absence of appropriate political objectives. The defence planner, the strategist, and the military field commander are disarmed by the absence of clear political guidance. This second basic problem in the nexus between politics and war and strategy appears historically in four guises.

1. Defence planners and military commanders can be charged to accomplish objectives beyond the military means available. Notwithstanding the temporal geostrategic sequencing intended, Hitler's political ambitions encompassed what would amount to achievement of a global hegemony, and required the military ability to defeat all challenges to the establishment of such a hegemony.<sup>28</sup>
2. Political guidance to the military commander may direct him to be more restrained in what he chooses to accomplish by force of arms than the political aim really requires. The military operational goal should match the political goal. The Gulf War of 1991 stands as a classic example of what happens when ill-informed political guidance meets friction and the fog of war in a campaign that appears to be a stunning success.<sup>29</sup> In 1991 the coalition's military commander, General Norman Schwartzkopf, lacked a real grip on operational happenings and believed that his forces had inflicted a more conclusive defeat on the enemy than in fact was the case.
3. The political guidance that should inform and shape strategy may be missing in action. A general may be dispatched, as was Erwin Rommel in 1941, with only vague political guidance, though Hitler's limited and generally defensive intent was clear enough. Rommel's task was to help stabilize the Italian front in North Africa and prevent North Africa, and the Mediterranean more broadly, from becoming a dangerous distraction from the invasion of the Soviet Union that was scheduled for the early summer of 1941. In the best, or worst,

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>28</sup> Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938–1939: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton, NJ, 1984); Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton, NJ, 1993); Jeffrey Record, *Hollow Victory: A Contrary View of the Gulf War* (Washington, DC, 1993); Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston, 1995).

German tradition, Rommel created dazzling strategic possibilities out of tactical and operational success.<sup>30</sup>

4. The final problem in the politics-war nexus takes the form of objectives that cannot be operationalized in military terms. For example, US political goals in Vietnam could not be expressed plausibly in identifiable, achievable objectives for the armed forces.

It is easy to slip into counselling what amounts to strategic perfection. Because the art of strategy is so difficult, there is an abundance of explanation as to why politics and war often march out of step. Who knows for certain what an army can accomplish until it tries? Flexibility on the part of the policymaker need not be evidence of incomprehension, indecision, or cynical opportunism; it may simply indicate a willingness to adjust policy ambition to the demonstrated prowess of the nation's arms on the battlefield. The impediments to successful strategic performance are so substantial that one should be generous in the distribution of praise, sparing in the apportionment of blame, and empathetic in considering the problems of the strategist. The curse of hindsight for fair historical appraisal is under-recognized.

### **DIALOGUE IS DIFFICULT BETWEEN POLITICS AND WAR**

The third general problem to beset the relationship between war and politics is the difficulty of establishing and sustaining a genuine dialogue between warriors and politicians. Unless a state approximates the condition of an army with a country, as was said of eighteenth-century Prussia, and of Wilhelmine Germany after the fall of General Erich Graf von Falkenhayn in August 1916, civil-military relations will prove a rich source of tension for strategy-making and strategy execution. Scholarly discussion of the value of dialogue between policymaker and military commander is apt to forget that ideal types can creep subversively into the analysis. Although there often is a problem of mutual ignorance in the politics-war nexus, that problem is by no means the only source of difficulty for civil-military relations.

Politicians and generals tend to lack understanding of, and empathy for, each other's roles. It is not so commonplace to notice that politicians and generals are often less than competent in their own sphere of responsibility, let alone in the sphere of the other. There will always be mediocre politicians and generals, and they will be promoted to a level of responsibility for which they are not competent. What often appears to be professional incompetence is really nothing more sinister than ignorance. In Europe in 1914, for example, neither the leading

<sup>30</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart (ed.), *The Rommel Papers* (London, 1953), pts. 1-3; David Fraser, *Knight's Cross: A Life of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel* (London, 1993), pt. 4; Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel, *Germany and the Second World War, iii: The Mediterranean, South-East Europe, and North Africa, 1939-1941* (Oxford, 1995), pt. 5.

politicians nor the designated field commanders understood their own mission in a great war, let alone the mission of the other occupational group. Some individual wars can share characteristics, but more often than not the challenge in each conflict is sufficiently novel for both politician and general to have major difficulty adapting expertise to the case specifically at hand. Lord Kitchener, the principal arbiter of British strategy in 1914–15,<sup>31</sup> had seen a considerable amount of war. Unfortunately, perhaps, he had never seen a war such as that which erupted in August 1914.

Four reasons in particular stand out as major contributors to the friction that is wont to impair the fruitful dialogue between politics and war, policymakers and generals, that is so self-evidently desirable.

### *Culture Clash*

The culture, ethos, and skills most typical respectively of politicians and generals work systemically to impair genuine communication between them. Character tends to fade into caricature all too easily. Words are the stock-in-trade of the politician. In addition, political leaders, especially war leaders, are likely to lean on the side of undeniable eloquence. There have been eloquent generals, but eloquence *per se* is not highly regarded in the military profession. Generals are liable to find their political masters to be glib windbags, able to argue persuasively for whatever is the latest strategic idea to come their way. Politicians are liable to find generals both inarticulate and hence presumably intellectually limited and therefore to be despised or patronized, as well as focused upon narrowly military matters. The historical exemplar of this phenomenon in the twentieth century was the appallingly poor relationship in 1917–18 between the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, General Sir Douglas Haig.<sup>32</sup> Lloyd George was no William Pitt the Elder, and Douglas Haig was no Marlborough, but each was the best available from his particular realm. Viewed in long retrospect, the high quality of each is beyond reasonable doubt. No less obvious is the inevitability of what amounted to a cultural clash between an over-articulate Welsh politician and a tongue-tied Scottish soldier. Gratuitous misunderstanding and lack of mutual esteem was present in their relationship from the outset. To the one, the other appeared as a rigid and mindlessly unimaginative ‘butcher’; while to the other the one was plainly a crafty politician with a silver tongue and no principles.

### *Reciprocal Ignorance*

The next problem with constructive dialogue between politics and war is

<sup>31</sup> Paul Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics, 1914–1918* (Oxford, 1965), pt. 1; John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy, c.1900–1916* (London, 1974), ch. 10; David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914–1916* (London, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals*; David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916–1918* (Oxford, 1995).

reciprocal ignorance. Politicians are promoted to the stratosphere of senior policymaking, membership in war cabinets, and the like for many reasons, but demonstrable skill in strategy is unlikely to be prominent among them. Politicians may know too little, if not of war *per se*, at least of the probable character of war today, to know what to demand or expect of their generals. Similarly, professional soldiers may know, perhaps choose to know, so little about the world of politics that they genuinely do not comprehend the policymaker's world-view. Unfortunately, the problem in civil-military relations is not just mutual ignorance. The malign effect of that ignorance can be multiplied by an all-too-personal human dimension which adds unhealthily to the brew, when individual politicians and soldiers distrust, despise, and dislike people whom they do not understand. Scholarly strategic theorists and sociologists of civil-military relations cannot afford to forget that theirs is a practical subject wherein real people attempt to conduct the strategic dialogue between politics and war. In modern times, there are few politicians who understand what Clausewitz called the 'grammar' of war,<sup>33</sup> how war works as war, or even how war works at the preparatory stage of defence mobilization. Also, there are few generals who understand what Clausewitz called the policy 'logic' of war.

### *Distinctive Responsibilities*

Distinctive responsibilities complicate the process of orchestrating the 'grammar' and 'logic' of war through constructive dialogue. Legends of callous, bloodthirsty generals confronting militarily unworldly, casualty-shy politicians who are always searching for the strategic 'free lunch' often are exactly that — legends. Nonetheless, the aphorism that 'where you stand depends on where you sit' contains more than a grain of truth. With the exception of execution of a nuclear war plan, the responsibility of a military commander will be more restricted than is that of the policymaker. The policymaker wages war, while the military commander fights battles or conducts campaigns; between those realms, though drawing from them both, lies the 'bridging' zone of strategy. Though eloquent on the subject of the political instrumentality of war, Clausewitz offers little to help educate the policymaker and military commander for their critical mutual dealings.

The politician is an expert generalist. His or her role in national security is to articulate a suitable vision of security, to select attainable policy goals in pursuit of that vision, and to act as competent broker among the interests that beg for preeminent consideration. The political war leader has to choose among competing military demands and apparent opportunities, including economically rival capabilities in the near term versus medium term. In addition, the politician may have to strike a balance between commitment to military and to civil purposes, and temporally between the needs of war today and the assets preserved to be

<sup>33</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.

productive in peace tomorrow.<sup>34</sup> The general who needs reinforcements and new equipment now, lest his army invite defeat through numerical and material weakness, is unlikely to empathize with the choices facing the policymaker who must decide among all theatres of operation, between civil and military demands, and between the needs of today and the probable needs of the future. The activity of the policymaker belongs in the realm of statecraft.

If it is essential for the statesman to act as broker for all interests, and if the military commander is to rely upon the world of statecraft to fulfil that function, it follows that the military profession has to be true to its expertise. The military commander, or perhaps senior military adviser to the government, has responsibility both upwards and downwards. He is responsible to his polity for the military integrity and strategic effectiveness of the armed forces. He is responsible, also, to those armed forces for the military integrity of the missions they are assigned as an instrument of state policy. Above all else, the professional military person must be viewed by politicians and military subordinates as a repository of sound military advice. Politicians and the country as a whole have a right to expect senior military professionals to speak military, and hence probably strategic, truth to political power. If politicians demand the militarily impossible, then the military adviser or commander must call political fantasy what it is, in military terms, and—if necessary—resign. Similarly, the rank and file of the armed forces have every right to require of their military leaders that militarily futile operations should not be undertaken, at least not without some overwhelmingly powerful political reason. Occasionally, and for excellent military reasons, the tactical and operational levels of war are obliged to provide what amounts to suicidal rear-guard actions. More controversial are military operations designed, if not to fail, at least to make the point that that kind of operation is unlikely to succeed (Dieppe, August 1942, springs to mind, as does the US attempt to rescue its hostages in Iran in April 1980).<sup>35</sup> Statecraft and war have several levels: preeminently the political, strategic, operational, and tactical. It can be difficult to explain to people who might die at the tactical level of war that the tactical failure of their mission can translate as operational, strategic, and political success. Infrequently, strategists need to demonstrate that something is impracticable.

Hindsight is a leading difficulty with this topic of distinctive civil and military responsibilities. There was a lack of genuine dialogue between the leadership of the British army and the government throughout World War I, but neither side was trying to mislead the other. Both military people and civilians were striving as best they knew how to address modern mass warfare. The difficulties in transforming a 'break-in' into a 'breakthrough' into a 'breakout' on the Western Front

<sup>34</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987).

<sup>35</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (Westport, Conn., 1996), 177.

by and large were not withheld from politicians; rather, the facts about these difficulties emerged only slowly from a long process of bloody experimentation.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the truth about the military-operational perils of nuclear alerts in the Cold War was not withheld from US or Soviet civilian policymakers, who blithely played at crisis management with the assumption that their military tools would not themselves inadvertently become catalysts of war.<sup>37</sup> That truth was that operational crisis stability was always less reliable than policymakers assumed. There is some evidence to suggest, for example, that in neither of the nuclear crises over Cuba in October 1962 and Israel in October 1973 did American policymakers worry as seriously as perhaps they should have done about the possibility that technical or operational instabilities might trigger a war that neither side intended.<sup>38</sup>

With hindsight, one can identify mismatches between military instruments and policy reach; in World War I and II on the Anglo-French, then on the German, side, in Korea for the United States in the autumn of 1950, and in Vietnam again for the United States in the 1960s. With hindsight it is obvious that military professionals on both sides from 1914 until mid-1918, in Germany in 1940–1, and in the United States in September–October 1950 and 1964–5, tended to an undue optimism. Today, many scholars believe that they know what British, French, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian generals should have said to the realm of high policy in 1914, what German generals should have said in 1940–1, and what American generals should have said in 1950, 1962, 1964–5, and 1973. But such scholarly judgements can be profoundly unhistorical. The real difficulty is that even the best professional military advice frequently will be wrong.

Although Clausewitz warns of the risks in war that should have a sobering effect upon a politician inclined to gamble upon a quick military solution to a political problem, he does not really alert the politician to the perils in military advice. Those perils take some of their fuel from the difficulty found by military experts in understanding their technically dynamic trade well enough. War is highly variable in at least two principal ways. On the one hand, the grammar of war changes with technology, *inter alia*. On the other hand, the grammar is always local and individual to the particular conflict at issue. With reference to the historical scope of this book, the wars of 1900–10, apart from the significant exception of

<sup>36</sup> Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914–18* (Oxford, 1992); id., *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven, Conn., 1996); Paddy Griffith (ed.), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, 1996), esp. chs. 1, 2, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Scott D. Sagan, 'Nuclear Alerts and Crisis Management', *International Security*, 9 (1985), 99–139; Bruce G. Blair, *Strategic Command and Control: Redefining the Nuclear Threat* (Washington, DC, 1985); Ashton B. Carter, John D. Steinbruner, and Charles A. Zraket (eds.), *Managing Nuclear Operations* (Washington, DC, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> Bruce G. Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War* (Washington, DC, 1993); Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 1994).

submarine mines,<sup>39</sup> were all geographically two-dimensional on the land and the surface of the sea. In contrast, such interstate war as occurred in the 1990s was geographically at least five-dimensional (land, sea, air, space, EMS-cyberspace).<sup>40</sup> Each conflict in the 1900s and 1990s was unique, but still it was shaped by the technological (*inter alia*) parameters of its period.

### *Strategy is Difficult*

The final source of friction in the interface between politics and war is the inherent difficulty in relating military action and intended political consequences. I have been a civilian strategic theorist for thirty years; for nearly twenty of those I had regular dealings with (American) military professionals, and yet I remain genuinely undecided as to how best a polity can educate people in strategy. It is the beginning of wisdom to grasp that military action has political meaning only through its strategic effect. But between policymakers who must be competent domestic politicians and military commanders and advisers who must be successful soldiers, a systemic cultural inclination to miscommunicate is all but foreordained.

To the politician, the soldier is focused upon battlefield success as an end in itself. To the soldier, the politician is insensitive to the human cost of strategic advantage; a person who regards the warrior merely as an instrument of policy, as an agent of his or her will. Scarcely more conducive to constructive dialogue between politics and war is the historically deviant phenomenon of politicians so fearful of casualties that they demand bloodless victories. American generals have long favoured sending steel, rather than men, to perform military tasks.<sup>41</sup> It is not the case, however, that American generals from the Civil War years until the 1980s have been unusually careful with the lives of their men. Indeed, it was a frequent American complaint in World War II that British politicians and generals tended to be casualty-averse to the point of military ineffectiveness. In the 1940s, Americans attributed that particular British disease to the trauma of the Western Front in the Great War.<sup>42</sup> It is ironic that

<sup>39</sup> Newton A. McCully, *The McCully Report: The Russo-Japanese War, 1904-05*, repr. of 1906 report (Annapolis, Md., 1977), 248; Philip Towle, 'The Evaluation of the Experience of the Russo-Japanese War', in Bryan Ranft (ed.), *Technical Change and British Naval Policy, 1860-1939* (London, 1977), 65-79; Richard Connaughton, *The War of the Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear: A Military History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-5* (London, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Bruce W. Watson (ed.), *Military Lessons of the Gulf War* (London, 1991); Jeffrey McCausland, *The Gulf Conflict: A Military Analysis*, Adelphi Paper 282 (London, Nov. 1993). Domestic rather than inter-state quarrels dominated the 1990s, as was noted suitably in Steven R. David, 'Internal War: Causes and Cures', *World Politics*, 49 (1997), 552-76.

<sup>41</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York, 1973); Reginald C. Stuart, *War and American Thought: From the Revolution to the Monroe Doctrine* (Kent, OH, 1982); Geoffrey Perrett, *A Country Made by War: From the Revolution to Vietnam - the Story of America's Rise to Power* (New York, 1989); Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America*, rev. edn. (New York, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> G. D. Sheffield, 'The Shadow of the Somme: The Influence of the First World War on British Soldiers' Perceptions and Behaviour in the Second World War', in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945* (London, 1997), 29-39.



that British disease appeared in the United States in virulent form in the 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

The United States can employ information-led weaponry that increasingly consists of unmanned machines for terrestrial bombardment. Such 'post-heroic warfare' is occasionally feasible for some polities.<sup>44</sup> But, is 'post-heroic warfare' conducted so as to minimize friendly casualties a strategically effective form of war? Particularly in circumstances of highly asymmetric conflict, as with the United States in Vietnam, a failure by civilians to understand the requirements, including the human costs, of war leaves the military commander in a terrible dilemma. Few military professionals have built successful careers by resolutely saying 'no' to superiors. Furthermore, because in asymmetric conflict straightforward military—as contrasted with political—defeat is not a plausible outcome, the consequences of military ineffectiveness are likely to be neither readily apparent nor even thoroughly intolerable. The US Army waged its preferred style of war in South Vietnam, albeit with ambitions constrained by policy, but could not deliver operational, let alone strategic, level success.<sup>45</sup>

It is appallingly difficult for politicians and warriors—the realms of policy and military command—to conduct a genuine dialogue so that the two stay in step. Politicians may ask too much, or too little, of their military instrument. That military instrument may be so professional in its determination to provide the military effectiveness that policy demands that its leaders resist what they judge to be political measures likely to impair that effectiveness. For example, if a German army general, a British admiral, or a US air force general believes that he holds in trust the military crown jewels of the country, he is not likely to be cooperative when politicians make demands which affront his responsibility to be ready to fight. In the cases just cited, there could be demands that mobilization should be directed against only Russia (rather than Russia and France) in 1914,<sup>46</sup> that major detachments should be effected from the Grand Fleet in 1914–15,<sup>47</sup> and that most of the Strategic Air Command (and submarine-based strategic missile force) should be withheld from an initial nuclear strike in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>48</sup> Each of these demands appear to contradict the 'principles of war' that insist upon concentration of effort for true economy of force.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> John Mueller, 'The Perfect Enemy: Assessing the Gulf War', *Security Studies*, 5 (1995), 77–117.

<sup>44</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, 'Toward Post-Heroic Warfare', *Foreign Affairs*, 74 (1995), 109–22; id., 'A Post-Heroic Military Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 75 (1996), 33–44; id., 'From Vietnam to Desert Fox: Civil-Military Relations in Modern Democracies', *Survival*, 431 (1999), 99–112.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Herwig, *First World War*, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis* (2 vols., London, 1938), i. 371, 384.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 2nd edn. (London, 1989), ch. 25.

<sup>49</sup> John I. Alger, *The Quest for Victory: The History of the Principles of War* (Westport, Conn., 1982); id., *Definitions and Doctrine of the Military Art: Past and Present* (Wayne, NJ, 1985), 8–11.

### *A Case in Point: Britain and the Continental Commitment, 1905–1915*

The proposition that strategy is an art and not a science, a proposition that even Jomini formally endorsed,<sup>50</sup> pervades these pages. The dedicated pursuer of strategic wisdom is occasionally able to close with significant strategic argument. Readers can supply their own favourite examples, but the case of the British Empire from 1905 until late 1915 provides an unusually rich source of arguments, principles, dilemmas, and indeed everything that makes life interesting for the strategist. A discussion of this period illustrates the claim that it is difficult for the worlds of politics and war to establish and sustain the kind of constructive dialogue that Clausewitz all but takes for granted as a factor in success in war.

It is all very well to say that 'war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means'. How does this aphorism, even definition, translate into actual strategic choices? For Britain in 1905, what kind of war, against whom, for which objectives, should be the focus of military planning by the new general staff? The dominant problem was how best to balance power in Europe. The authoritative principle was to join, or at least behave in support of, the second strongest state or coalition. Practical difficulties, however, then intruded.

As a consequence of the first Morocco crisis in 1905, British military planners, for the first time in several generations, discerned the strong possibility of a continental alliance. The terms of the strategic problem for London improved radically, from consideration of how Britain might unilaterally wage war against Germany to how Britain might wage war as an ally of France.<sup>51</sup> Political guidance to the British armed forces, save in the form of budgetary constraints and a persisting unwillingness to adopt continental style conscription, was less than useful. British policy, though periodically alarmed by the apparent strategic implications of German naval construction and generally determined to do what was needed to deny an emerging European hegemony to imperial Germany,<sup>52</sup> was less than firm on key matters. The British government repeatedly refused actual alliance with France, declined to make definitive and specific military promises of contingent continental intervention, and did not decide in advance just what would constitute a *casus belli*.

Thanks to the scholarship of such historians as Samuel R. Williamson, Jr. and John Gooch, the facts of British military planning and the dialogue between that planning and policy are now well established.<sup>53</sup> If, as I believe, Britain was wise to

<sup>50</sup> Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, repr. of 1862 edn. (London, 1992), 321–3.

<sup>51</sup> The most relevant archival documents are reproduced in Charles E. Callwell, *Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance: Their Relations and Interdependence*, ed. Colin S. Gray, repr. of 1905 edn. (Annapolis, Md., 1996), app. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London, 1980).

<sup>53</sup> Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904–1914* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969); Gooch, *Plans of War*. In addition, see Neil W. Summerton, 'The Development of British Military Planning for a War Against Germany, 1904–1914' (Ph.D. thesis, London, 1970);

oppose the erratic German bid for continental hegemony in the early decades of the twentieth century,<sup>54</sup> did British statecraft and strategy perform as well as anyone empathetic to what was known at the time could expect?

In 1905 the British General Staff was asked to consider what the British field army (approximately 120,000 available men) might achieve in a war with Germany. General Staff memoranda dated 28 August and 3 October 1905 argued respectively for an amphibious diversion in the Baltic and for inserting what was to become the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) into the main theatre of operations. In the words of Colonel Charles E. Callwell of the General Staff:

An efficient army of 120,000 British Troops might just have the effect of preventing any important German successes on the Franco-German frontier, and of leading up to the situation that Germany, crushed at sea, also felt herself impotent on land. That would almost certainly bring about a speedy, and from the British and French point of view satisfactory, peace.<sup>55</sup>

Britain had to decide (i) whether and over what issue to fight, (ii) where to fight (in the Baltic, or from Antwerp, or from the Franco-Belgian, or even Franco-German, border), (iii) under whose control to fight (distinctively from the French, or independently though with the French, or actually under French command), and (iv) how hard to fight. Unlike the US challenge in Vietnam in 1964–5, Britain in 1914, and again in 1939–40, at least had a clear policy goal; in the vernacular, it was simply to ‘stop Germany’ and restore the *status quo ante*.

Whether or not the temporary victory achieved in autumn 1918 was worth its human and other costs to Britain is best viewed as an irrelevant issue. British leaders and society did what they had to do to stop Germany, and the bill was not calculable in advance. From the viewpoint of grand strategy, the British war effort was masterful indeed; readers who doubt that judgement are invited to compare the lists of allies and co-belligerents for the *Entente* with the list for the Central Powers. At the level of military strategy, courtesy both of its imprudently far-forward assembly area around the French frontier fortress of Mauberge and of the unexpected extent of the westward sweep of the Germans across the Meuse and Sambre rivers,<sup>56</sup> the BEF found itself in a blocking position astride the invasion

Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London, 1972), chs. 1–2; C. J. Lowe and M. L. Dockrill, *The Mirage of Power: British Foreign Policy, 1903–22*, iii: *The Documents* (London, 1972); David French, *British Economic and Strategic Planning, 1905–1915* (London, 1982).

<sup>54</sup> For a contrasting view, see Niall Ferguson, ‘The Kaiser’s European Union: What if Britain Had “Stood Aside” in August 1914?’, in Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London, 1997), 228–80; id., *The Pity of War* (London, 1998). Contrary to Ferguson, I believe Britain had no prudent choice other than to join the anti-German coalition in 1914. Had Britain stood aside, Germany would have defeated France and Russia. Britain then would have been deservedly friendless, facing a hegemonic Germany with an undamaged—indeed probably augmented—High Seas Fleet.

<sup>55</sup> Callwell, *Military Operations*, 454.

<sup>56</sup> Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, 122, 169–70, 176.

route of General Alexander von Kluck's First Army. Alone among the great powers, Britain's military plans in 1914 produced their long-advertised strategic effect; as forecast on 3 October 1905 by Callwell,<sup>57</sup> it is plausible to argue that the BEF from August to November 1914 made a decisive impact upon the course and outcome of a continental war. At the price of its own destruction in the First Battle of Ypres, the BEF of 1914 yielded a leverage in strategic effect out of all proportion to its modest size.

Given German dependency on the Swedish economy in a long war, it is possible that there may have been more to recommend Baltic schemes for British strategy early in the twentieth century than policymakers at the time, or most historians since, have allowed.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the long-term strategic cost of sacrificing a small professional army in the first campaign of the war was a heavy one.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, if British policy to prevent German hegemony was correct in the period 1905–18, given that nobody knew for certain about modern continental-scale warfare, how much better a performance could be asked of British statesmen and strategists? In World War II, the abrupt German demolition of the first British alliance system and continental commitment in 1939–40 indefinitely postponed renewal of that commitment, pending the commission by Germany of grand strategic errors. In World War I, notwithstanding the apparent strategic flexibility accorded by a workable maritime superiority, the vital role of the French alliance locked British military effort into Belgium and northern France, *faute de mieux*.

The chief problem with Clausewitz on the instrumentality of force is that his magisterial analysis and dicta inadvertently obscure the true difficulty of the subject. As the great man said, 'Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy.'<sup>60</sup> Even if one is clear enough about policy goals, or war aims, every war is distinctive in the detail of *all* its dimensions. Policy may be certain (e.g. in 1914 for Britain, to stop Germany, or in 1982, again for Britain, to retake the Falkland Islands), but the capabilities of one's armed forces in combat against an actual enemy must be less certain (e.g. in 1914, can the British army make a strategic difference in a continental war? Or, in 1982, can British forces retake the Falkland Islands at a cost that British society will deem bearable and proportionate to what is at stake?). The problem most essential to strategy as contrasted with the other levels of conflict is the sheer complexity of its domain. Having grasped the central Clausewitzian truth about war as an instrument of politics, one then has to consider how to make strategy work well enough in the face of probably inconstant politicians, variably competent armed forces,

<sup>57</sup> Callwell, *Military Operations*, 454.

<sup>58</sup> I am grateful to Dr Andrew Lambert of King's College, London, for his intriguing, and decidedly revisionist, thoughts on this subject.

<sup>59</sup> Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *Death of an Army* (London, 1967).

<sup>60</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 178.

unreliable allies, and an enemy who is planning to do his best to thwart our efforts at all levels.

## **THE FORCE OF ETHICS: OR, THE DOG THAT DOES NOT BARK**

The claim, or hope, for *Gott mit uns* that long embellished the belt-buckle of the *Landser*, the German soldier, expressed a universal human psychological need. Soldiers and their strategic directors may not care much about doing good, but they are not comfortable with the idea that they are doing harm. Fortunately for the mental health of soldier and strategist, though unfortunately for the authority of moral analysis and discourse, the ethical dimension to war and strategy is as indeterminate as it is real; there is always scope for local interpretation. That is not to deny the burgeoning fact of what Michael Walzer has usefully called the 'war convention';<sup>61</sup> rather, in application important elements of that convention are subject to rival interpretations. In Walzer's words, the war convention comprises 'the set of articulated norms, customs, professional codes, legal precepts, religious and philosophical principles, and reciprocal arrangements that shape our judgments of military conduct'. The convention provides a rich argument for convenient deployment by those in need.

### **ETHICS ARE EASY, BUT NOT SIMPLE**

Ethics have a practical character exactly the reverse of strategy. Whereas strategy, following Clausewitz, is simple but not easy, ethics are easy but not simple. Important though ethics are and should be as a guide to behaviour, on the historical evidence there is less to this topic than meets the eye. Ethics is a dimension of war and strategy wherein arguments that are massively dubious in theory nonetheless seem to work well enough in practice. Many war cabinet rooms, ships' bridges, aircraft cockpits, and soldiers' camp-fires ought to resonate with arguments about justice and war, ends and means, but they do not. Although Walzer informs us that '[n]uclear weapons explode the theory of just war',<sup>62</sup> to date that claim has failed to register to notable effect among the shapers and executive agents of nuclear war plans, world-wide.<sup>63</sup>

Ethics are important—at least, so almost everybody claims, and there are grounds for believing them. People care about right conduct. Ethics are fundamental in a sense in which politics are not. In principle, political action is subject

<sup>61</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York, 1977), 44.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 282.

<sup>63</sup> The pertinent issues are aired in Russell Hardin et al. (eds.), *Nuclear Deterrence: Ethics and Strategy* (Chicago, 1985); Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Nuclear Ethics* (New York, 1986); Henry Shue (ed.), *Nuclear Deterrence and Moral Restraint: Critical Choices for American Strategy* (Cambridge, 1989).

to ethical assay, whereas ethically driven action should not be subject to authoritative political judgement. In the practical world of strategic effect, however, a consequentialist logic rules. The justice of behaviour is weighed in the light of its intended, anticipated, and actual, effect. Form follows function. The 'war convention' that is our living and dynamic heritage does not operate as a distinctive source of difficulty for strategy, at least not in the connection between politics and war.

Even in the world of strategy, ethical concerns are so internalized by individuals and social organizations that explicit treatment of topics about justice are exceedingly rare. Ethics, as a distinctive source of constraint or encouragement bearing upon strategic behaviour, remain of trivial significance. This is to claim neither that ethical beliefs have been unimportant nor that modern strategic history lacks an ethical dimension. The point is that, although a library of philosophical and psychological speculation has been written about ethics and modern war, and although there is now a legal library on the subject of war crimes, no sound strategic history of the twentieth century would spend many pages on ethics as an independent shaper of strategic behaviour. Subject to the admittedly proliferating laws of war,<sup>64</sup> soldiers and strategists have been inclined to view the claims of justice as translated by the perceived needs of their particular polity, civilization, or ideology, and as mediated by the political-military necessities of the moment.

### **'ADVANCE TO BARBARISM' IN AN EVER MORE REGULATED WORLD?**

The second general observation about the force of ethics in modern strategy reflects the proliferation since the 1850s of legal guidance for behaviour bearing upon war, and of the practical dominance of culture over legal duty. Many authorities have noted what has been called an 'advance to barbarism' temporally coincident with the proliferation of solemn international commitments in the field of the laws of war.<sup>65</sup> The prudential strategic choices exercised in the twentieth century were little encumbered by explicit ethical constraint. For nearly a century and a half multiplying conventions, treaties, protocols, and declarations have endeavoured to build a 'convention' for the greater humanization of war (preeminently the Treaty of Paris, 1856, the Geneva Conventions, 1864, 1906, 1929, 1977, the Geneva Gas Protocol, 1925, the St Petersburg Declaration, 1868, the Hague Conventions, 1899, 1907, the Nuremberg judgments of 1947, and the UN Charter and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). These modern efforts to provide a positive law of war may well have saved many thousands of lives. The central problem with the authority of this expanding body of law and quasi-law, however, has been its apparent inability to provide humane discipline

<sup>64</sup> Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York, 1980); id., *War and Law since 1945* (Oxford, 1994); Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman (eds.), *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (New Haven, Conn., 1994).

<sup>65</sup> 'A. Jurist' (pseud. for F. J. P. Veale), *Advance to Barbarism* (London, 1948).

in the truly hard cases when the cultural dimension of war and strategy threatens to overwhelm the ethical.

Although the history of the twentieth century could record a myriad of decisions by individual soldiers to eschew strict military prudence in favour of ethically more right conduct, that history does not record major cases wherein a distinctively ethical, as contrasted with a bluntly prudential, reasoning shaped statecraft and strategy. The fact that many belligerents wage war as they must, and not as they might choose, flags the elasticity in the principle of military necessity. This ethically perilous doctrine found honest expression in these words by Britain's Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir John Dill, on 15 June 1940: 'At a time when our National existence is at stake when we are threatened by an implacable enemy who himself recognizes no rules save those of expediency, we should not hesitate to adopt whatever means appear to offer the best chance of success.'<sup>66</sup> This decent English officer and gentleman spoke for the reality of strategic history. In practice, often it would be strategically imprudent and therefore inexpedient to adopt a lawless approach to conduct in war. Nonetheless, while granting that just conduct can avoid strategic disadvantage, politics and would-be politics often believe that military necessity has a superordinate ethic all its own.

### **WAR CRIMES, OR THE CRIME OF WAR?**

Observation number three on ethics in twentieth-century warfare is a question that points to a persisting unease about the proper object for treatment. If war is an inevitable feature of the human condition, then there is much to be said in praise of its limitation and 'humanization': but, is war inevitable? Do efforts to humanize war help legitimize what should be regarded as the worst crime of all, war itself, and to impose opportunity costs significant for the prospects for war's abolition? Following the horrors of the 'Great' war of 1914-18, a war that on land, though not at sea, by and large was conducted justly according to the war convention of the period, many people sought to slay war rather than tame it. This belief that war should be regarded as inherently beyond the pale of 'civilized' behaviour, though shaken by the rematch of 1939-45, was naturally reinforced by the implications of nuclear facts after 1945. As a practical matter, however, the nexus between politics and war has not been severed by the ethical dilemmas posed either by modern war itself or even by prospective choices over its conduct. It might be said that ethics is akin to the dog that does not bark in the night.<sup>67</sup> One might believe that the ethical dimension to war and strategy should have posed individual and collective crises of conscience fatal for continuation of the familiar course of strategic history, but that subversive thought has no place in this text.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Edward M. Spiers, *Chemical Warfare* (London, 1986), 67.

<sup>67</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories* (London, 1928), 326-7.

The concern here is to aid understanding of modern strategy, not to suggest alternative strategic, or anti-strategic, histories.

### THE ROAD TO HELL IS MADE AND USED BY HIGH TECHNOLOGY

The fourth general observation on the force of ethics is to claim that there are no technological passports out of ethically troubling terrain. Adam Roberts suggests persuasively 'that new weaponry . . . has perhaps been overrated as a cause of barbarism in two world wars'.<sup>68</sup> But in emphasizing culture, Roberts falls into the trap of misreading the technical history of World War II. He advises that

the lists of names on war memorials in England, the United States, and many other countries are far shorter for 1939-45 than they were for 1914-18. This fact was not due to the laws of war, but rather to developments in military technology (especially the tank) and strategy (the blitzkrieg and its variants) which tended to favour decisive action rather than a war of attrition.<sup>69</sup>

Roberts is correct when he argues that the barbarity of World War II in Eastern Europe and in Asia had political, social, and especially cultural, rather than military-technical, roots.<sup>70</sup> He is not correct, however, in his argument that new military technology for strategic decision lowered casualty rates in the wars of 1939-45. The Eastern Front of World War II was analogous—and then some, given its character as a *Kulturkampf*—to the Western Front of World War I. Moreover, even for Anglo-American forces, casualty rates for the principal continental campaign of 1944-5,<sup>71</sup> as well as in the air war,<sup>72</sup> were entirely in line with the levels of 1914-18.

Necessity requires that polities make the ethical best of the hands that they are dealt, or that they have little practicable option other than to deal themselves. Following its continental operational failures in 1914-16, imperial Germany was desperate to identify a theory of victory in the war. The ethical case against unrestricted submarine war upon Allied trade was overborne by the quasi-ethical notion of reprisal against Allied (indiscriminate) economic warfare,<sup>73</sup> and the balance of prudential logic which suggested that Britain would be obliged to cease hostilities before US intervention could have decisive effect. Operationally speaking, Germany employed U-boats against Allied trade in the only way practicable, given the nature of submarines—which is to say that the U-boats sank their victims without warning.

<sup>68</sup> Adam Roberts, 'Land Warfare: From Hague to Nuremberg', in Howard et al., *Laws of War*, 138.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 130.

<sup>70</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986).

<sup>71</sup> Sheffield, 'Shadow of the Somme', 35-6.

<sup>72</sup> John Terraine, *A Time for Courage: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939-1945* (New York, 1985), 682.

<sup>73</sup> A. C. Bell, *A History of the Blockade of Germany and of the Countries Associated with Her in the Great War, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, 1914-1918* (London, 1937).



Until the summer of 1944 at least, night bombing, or bombing in bad weather, could not achieve precise discrimination of military from civilian targets. The ethical argument levelled against the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command in World War II is not that it was an inherently indiscriminate instrument of destruction, a charge that by and large was technically accurate only until mid-1944. Rather, it is the charge that the Command persisted, in the absence of a truly compelling strategic rationale, with 'area' attacks long after a significant measure of discrimination in bombardment was technically feasible.<sup>74</sup> Ironically, perhaps, whereas RAF Bomber Command technically speaking had a broad choice between area and precision bombing in 1944-5, the United States Army Air Forces' (USAAF) Twentieth Air Force had no practicable choice in 1945 between the precision or the area bombing of Japan.<sup>75</sup> In the absence of target intelligence about the exact location of what amounted to Japan's highly dispersed cottage industry of defence subcontractors, General Curtis LeMay could only attack Japanese war-supporting industry by attacking Japanese urban areas *per se*. One may be morally appalled at such a rationale, but it reflected the strategic reality of the specific case.

For a more recent twist to this story, although there are more and less careful ways to target a nuclear-armed force of bombers and ballistic and cruise missiles, it is a technical fact for statecraft and ethics that nuclear weapons derive their value for strategic effect from their exceptionally high ratio of energy yield released to weight of explosive device. It can be misleading to assert that nuclear weapons are inherently indiscriminate, because alternatives among targeting schemes could be significant. Nonetheless, there was never even a remote prospect of the ethical dimension to strategy denying the contingent use of nuclear weapons to the realm of politics. If nuclear weapons are inevitable, a necessary evil if one prefers, can a polity prudentially do other than seek to tame those weapons for strategic purposes? A different view is advanced by those who believe that nuclear weapons can be tamed by the same kind of 'taboo' that has long inhibited strategic exploitation of chemical weapons.<sup>76</sup>

Although culture can dominate the influence of technology on war, one should not dismiss as trivial what amounts to the military necessities commanded by contemporary weaponry. Scholars of strategy and international relations today, people generally lacking personal military experience as well as technical educa-

<sup>74</sup> Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945* (4 vols., London, 1961); Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (New York, 1979); Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book, 1939-1945* (London, 1985); Horst Boog (ed.), *The Conduct of the Air War in the Second World War: An International Comparison* (New York, 1992).

<sup>75</sup> Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York, 1985), chs. 6-8; Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, Conn., 1987); Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (Lawrence, Kan., 1993), ch. 9.

<sup>76</sup> Richard M. Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo* (Ithaca, NY, 1997).

tion, are inclined to be unduly dismissive of the world of military necessity, of the 'grammar' of war.

### JUST BEHAVIOUR PAYS BEST

Notwithstanding the apparently dismissive judgements registered above about the typical absence of ethical effect upon strategic choice, this analysis advises adherence to plausible definitions of just conduct.<sup>77</sup> In human affairs, including statecraft and strategy, might is not right, and those who would play the Athenian role of arrogant hegemon in the Melian dialogue can discover that right has a consequential might all its own.<sup>78</sup> However, the might of right is not reliable, which is why the forces of justice are well advised to be heavily armed.

Much more often than not, *Gott mit uns*, or *deus vult*, is believed by both sides to a conflict to bless their belligerent effort. In those normal cases the ethical equation should yield no advantage to either side, except that potential friends and allies may find the claims of one more just than the claims of the other. Those potential friends and allies will not be moved to act by considerations of justice alone, but such considerations can ease the path for action taken for prudential motives. The grimy reality of personal careerism and perfidious state opportunism may suggest otherwise, but plausible claims for just policy goals and right conduct have a value for popular political mobilization that is wont to embarrass the cynical. In all three great wars of this century—1914–18, 1939–45, 1947–89—the ultimately victorious parties enjoyed the advantages of an ethically compelling story. Soldiers can fight well even without intense political belief in their cause, as witness the French Colonial Army in Indochina and Algeria in the 1950s, and the US Army in Vietnam in 1968–70. To fight bereft of ideological support, however, is to fight with a self-inflicted wound. Just causes do not triumph because they are just, but belief that one's cause is just is a useful flak-jacket against the systemically unfriendly grammar of war.

## STRATEGIC ETHICS

The approach taken in this chapter to politics and ethics in their connection with war and strategy will not find universal favour. This discussion of ethical considerations finds that typically they play scant explicit role in the processes of strategy-making and strategy execution, though of course every individual and organization has internalized some notion of a (or the) moral universe. In practice,

<sup>77</sup> Robert E. Osgood and Robert W. Tucker, *Force, Order, and Justice* (Baltimore, 1967); Morton A. Kaplan (ed.), *Strategic Thinking and Its Moral Implications* (Chicago, 1973); Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (eds.), *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge, 1992); Colin S. Gray, 'Force, Order, and Justice: The Ethics of Realism in Statecraft', *Global Affairs*, 8 (1993), 1–17.

<sup>78</sup> Robert B. Strassler (ed.), *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to 'The Peloponnesian War'*, trans. Richard Crawley, rev. edn. (New York, 1996), 351–6.

it is hard to locate many unambiguous historical cases wherein prudential strategic logic was challenged from within the relevant defence community by people wielding explicitly ethical principles. The elastic realm of military and strategic necessity, even mere prudence, has a powerful ethic all its own. Ethics functions as the dog that does not bark and sound a moral alarm in strategic decisionmaking. The reason is because the ethical dimension to statecraft and strategy is already integral to the human and bureaucratic instruments that decide upon strategic issues. Far from providing the solution to the organized violence that is war, ethical ideas, well integrated into particular strategic cultures, are part of the problem. Within living memory millions of highly civilized Europeans in uniform were persuaded that it was not only a pleasure to slaughter the *Untermenschen*, it was also a moral duty owed to *Volk*, Führer, and the future of Western civilization. More recently still, the 'ethnic cleansers' in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s provided further demonstration of the sad truth that cultural preference can shape ethical judgement.

In practice, strategic performance is exceedingly difficult to effect well in relation to politics, but generally is not hampered by ethical considerations. My analysis presents a contrast. Strategy is simple, but not easy; ethics is complex, but easy to manage in strategic practice. Strategic ethics do not act distinctively as a brake upon strategic (mis)behaviour.