Keynote Address

How Do Wars End? The Problem of Victory and Defeat

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War is an absolute (even if there are gradations within it): we know it when we see it. However, we are uncertain about war's status in part because states no longer declare war. In 1921, J. A. Hall, a lawyer looking back on the outbreak of the First World War, observed that, if "a State chooses to seek its ends by war, international law can have nothing to do with the origins or purpose of that war or the rights and wrongs of the parties. It has no power to punish the wrong-doer or even to inquire who is the wrong-doer."[1] Seven years later the Kellogg-Briand pact endeavoured to address this legal deficit by prohibiting the use of war as an instrument of national policy except in cases of self-defence. The pact failed to prevent war, not just in 1939, but almost from the moment of its signature. However, that did not deter those anxious to legislate against its use. In 1945 the United Nations charter appropriated to the UN Security Council the right to use force to maintain or restore international peace and security. The only exception, contained in article 51 of the charter, was the same as that which the Kellogg-Briand pact had reserved to the sovereign state— the right to self-defence.

States are therefore reluctant to talk about going to war for very obvious reasons: in most cases international law does not allow them to do so. But the corollary of the ambiguity which arises from this divergence between declaratory principle and effective practice is that, just as we are no longer so certain what war is, so we are less sure what peace is. Peace too is out of fashion. The loosening of one definition has made us less sure about the other. Peace is treated as utopian and idealistic, not least because the fashionable concept of security obscures its distinction from war.

Those who live in western societies luxuriate in societies that are so persistently peaceful that they take that peace for granted, but that does not mean that there are not citizens of those same societies who are serving, killing and possibly dying in wars. During NATO's deployment to Afghanistan the citizens of most NATO countries rightly felt themselves to be at peace (so with less justification did their governments); most NATO service personnel felt themselves—equally rightly—to be at war. The member states of NATO members were under pressure to soften their conceptual awareness of the distinction between war and peace precisely because of the gulf between the daily experiences of those who live in western societies and of those who defend them. That softening of the difference, and our uncertainty as to which is the prevailing condition of our times, war or peace, are the means to enable those of us who live relatively secure lives to appreciate the efforts of those who do not. They help us to understand that our security rests on a concept of international order and a reader to defend and maintain it.

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[1]   J. A. Hall, *The Law of Naval Warfare* (London, 1921), 7.

The conflation of war and peace carries three particular consequences. The first is a failure to recognise that war is different from other dangers to global security. War's essential characteristic, as Clausewitz put it at the very beginning of *On War*, is that it is a clash of wills. The danger comes from the enemy and his determination to counter our intentions. War is a reciprocal relationship, and it is that reciprocity which gives war its own inherent dynamic. War's deliberate use of armed force makes it different from the challenges and threats posed by the natural world or even by other aspects of human interaction, such as economic competition. The currency of war is violence, done by one human being to another, and the very fact of its employment fundamentally changes the relationships between human beings.

Secondly, lumping all security threats together creates an artificial continuity, which rules out the play of policy and, above all, of contingency. In *The Shield of Achilles*, published in 2002, Philip Bobbitt saw the wars of the twentieth century as one long war, running from 1914 to 1990, and then used this historical analogy in his next book, *Terror and Consent* (2008), to understand the long term challenges posed by terrorism to liberalism, or to the "market state" as he called it. The "long war" became the successor title to the "global war on terror" at least two years before the global war on terror was formally declared over in 2009 by Barack Obama. The wars between England and France which spanned the years 1337 to 1453 only became known as the Hundred Years War in the nineteenth century. Similar points could be made about many long wars, the Thirty Years War, the Nine Years War and the Seven Years War, each of which aggregated a number of separate or separable conflicts, marked by armistices and sometimes fought in different theatres between different belligerents.

This point is particularly true of Bobbitt's "long war" of the twentieth century. The First World War ended in 1918, although there were "wars after wars" which ran on until the finalisation of the various peace settlements in 1923. The peacemakers who met at Versailles in 1919, and particularly President Woodrow Wilson of the United States (another academic who had migrated to public policy), possessed a truly ambitious vision for a new world order, which they hoped would ensure the early resolution of international conflict. Their ambitions outstripped their capacity to deliver, but the outbreak of the Second World War was not the inevitable product of the peace treaties that ended the First World War, whatever some Germans might have argued at the time and whatever some Americans, anxious to attack Wilson, have now come to believe. Most importantly, many states had little or limited experience of war between 1914 and 1945. The United States only fought between 1917 and 1918 and again between 1941 and 1945; Switzerland did not fight at all. And whom they fought changed: Russia was an ally of Britain in 1914-17 and of Britain and the United States in 1941-45, but became their adversary between 1948 and 1989. The notion of the long twentieth century war depends on a reading back from the stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War. It requires us to ignore the ideological distinction between fascism and communism. And, finally, it also overlooks the rather important point that the Cold War was not a hot war as the two world wars were.

Thirdly, failing to distinguish between war and peace, and so lumping wars together and lumping war with other security threats, does not just downplay contingency. Precisely because it does that, it ends up with little to say about causation, or at least the short-term

causes of wars. In its focus on the *longue durée*, it becomes almost Marxist in seeing wars as the product of inevitable clashes. It has little to say about wars that are short, or about wars that are fought between states or groupings that look socially and politically similar. Critically it does not explain why wars that seem inevitable do not always happen. Nor does it address the issues which confront the practitioners of strategy, who deal with policy here and now, as opposed to the theorists of strategy, who are anxious to put events into a context set by the past and orientated towards the future. The questions of causation come at the intersection between the two, between present and future, between reality and theory, which is precisely why the relationship between strategy in practice and strategy in theory is not an abstract matter but one of practical and vital importance. When, where and how will competition over scarce water supplies, or the melting of the polar ice cap, or the lack of fossil fuels produce war? Or will these issues actually not lead to war but be resolved by international or bilateral arbitration? Will the realisation that they could lead to war enable diplomacy to triumph over militarisation?

The causes of wars have kept historians of international relations busy since the development of history as an academic discipline over a century ago. But the diplomatic historians of the past, many of them great titans of the historical profession, tended to fall silent the moment the bullets started to fly, and only resumed their researches once the fighting had stopped. Their legacy is still with us. We know a great deal about the passage from peace to war, not least because the issue is one of concern not only to historians but also to theorists of international relations: the latter are being prudential as they need to understand war's causation in order to prevent it. We tend to pay less attention to the reverse process: the passage from war to peace.

International relations terminology helpfully distinguishes between what it calls conflict termination and conflict resolution. In other words it recognises that ending a war is not the same as removing the causes of the war or the hostility that the conduct of war may have engendered. A war needs to be fought through to the point where a strategic decision is evident; where one side knows that militarily it is not going to win. At that point cost-benefit calculations suggest that the defeated side should enter negotiations with the other side, the potential victor. Like war itself, this phase between war and peace remains nested in a bilateral relationship. The side that is winning has to accept the potential surrender of the side that is losing, and to offer terms that make surrender a palatable option, so much so that the defeated side will accept them rather than fight on. These terms may be minimal: no more than a guarantee that the victor will spare the lives of those who surrender. They may be much more generous, as were those offered in 1866 by Otto von Bismarck to Austria after its defeat by Prussia.

The negotiations are likely to be political, because, while battle is an exchange between armies, peace negotiations—at least those involving states—are an exchange between governments. If a non-state actor is a party to the war, for example in a war of national independence, then the aim will be to create a transitional government, so as to enable the move from war to peace. The compulsion to conclude war by inter-governmental negotiation can be evident even in the most extreme circumstances, and even in those where one side

has demanded "unconditional surrender." In 1945 the Japanese government was given the reassurance that the emperor would not be removed, so that some element of continuity would be preserved. In Germany, the allies negotiated with Karl Dönitz, who as Hitler's appointed successor, possessed a form of political legitimacy, however shallow it might have been.

The presumption within this state-driven model of war termination is that the government is the agency that surrenders. Is that right? Two other parties have an interest in the outcome of a war, at least within states, and they may behave differently from their government. The first is the armed forces. Surrender often begins with capitulation on the battlefield, with soldiers raising the white flag to show their readiness to talk or with a ship striking its colours. The notion of decisive victory relied on defeat or capitulation in the field leading to a political outcome: the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781 or Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815. But there have been massive surrenders which have led not to a political result but to a renewed commitment to fight, as the Soviet Union did in 1941 despite the loss of 3 million men between June and December.[2] Equally governments can decide to negotiate when their armed forces dispute that they have been defeated, as those of Germany did in 1918.

The second party with a stake in the government's decision is the nation as a whole. The people may reject the wish of the government to negotiate. Popular resistance to Napoleonic rule in Spain or Italy flowed from the differences between princely rulers and their peoples. The former were prepared to negotiate in the hope that they would save their thrones and status; the latter were not consulted, remote from central decision-making, and more likely to feel the hard hand of French occupation. In 1870 the Prussian army defeated the French army of Napoleon III in the decisive battle of Sedan. Although Napoleon accepted the verdict of the battlefield by abdicating, the war did not end. The French fought on, using forms of national resistance not unlike those that had been used against them in the Peninsular War sixty years previously. In democratic states the possibility of a division between government and people is diminished, but modern democracies can exaggerate the potential of that division when fighting more authoritarian regimes. Greater literacy and improved communications, through media like radio, film, television and the internet, have enhanced governmental control of popular responses. In 1944 the allies' hope that the German people would rise against Hitler was not fulfilled. In 2003, the United States, when it invaded Iraq, did not bank on the surrender of Saddam Hussein, but did anticipate – wrongly as it turned out – a rapturous welcome from his subjects. The calculation of the United States-led coalition was that they, not their leader, would take the decision to negotiate.

These relationships in the transfer from war to peace, between governments, armed forces and people, have therefore changed over time, particularly as democratisation has meant that the people are understood to be distinct political actors in their own right, and not seen simply as subjects of an absolute ruler. In the ancient and medieval worlds, and in Europe even into the eighteenth century, the pursuit of booty and plunder in war could unite the state and the individual in the motivation for going to war. By the same token these objectives also help explain how and why wars ended. At the individual level, those who were defeated were

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2   Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941-1945* (London, 2005), 116-117.

either killed or increasingly – as their asset value was appreciated – passed into slavery or were redeemed for ransom.

Possession, not negotiation, was the basis for ending war. Prolonged resistance simply produced obliteration. In 428 BC, during the Peloponnesian War, the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos in the Aegean sea, decided to revolt against Athenian rule and side with Sparta. The revolt was suppressed in 427 and Athens initially decided to kill all the men, and to sell the women and children into slavery. The next day, further discussion led it to revoke its decision, and to execute one thousand leading citizens instead. The trireme despatched with the second verdict managed to reach the city just in time to prevent that implementation of the first decision. This clemency reflected a belief that even in a democracy not all were equally responsible for the acts that were carried out on their behalf. The same argument was not applied just over a decade later, in 416 BC, when another Aegean island, Melos, which had asserted its neutrality in the war and so refused to join the Athens-led Delian league, fell after a prolonged siege. Athens killed all the adult males, and sent the women and children into slavery. Such summary treatment was far from unusual in the ancient world. Notoriously, Rome ended its long-running struggle with Carthage for control of the Mediterranean in 146 BC by destroying the city, annexing all its territory, and killing or enslaving the entire population. The political rallying cry of the republic, *Carthago delenda est*, that Carthage should be destroyed, was thus fulfilled.

War for Athens and Rome was the means to empire, to wealth, territory, revenue and population, and once one side had achieved those objectives the war ended. However, if war was no longer fought for material gain, but for reasons of religion or ideology, its outcomes could seem less clear cut and more open-ended. Victory might leave you master of the battlefield and therefore of its surrounding territory, its peoples and their assets, but it did not ensure conformity of faith or thought. The link between tactical delivery and political outcomes became less direct, and this disjunction remained true even after 1648, when at least ostensibly Europe turned its back on wars of religion.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, control of territory and resources remained the principal political driver in war, both in Europe and further afield, from Louis XIV's expansion of France to its "natural frontiers" on the Rhine and the Alps, to the competition between France and Britain for control of North America and India. The wars of Spanish, Austrian and Bavarian successions all made the same point: dynastic rights conferred territorial control. One of the great figures of political philosophy in the Enlightenment, Charles, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), disagreed with Thomas Hobbes, whose core assumption a century earlier was that man in a state of nature was given to war. Hobbes saw the state's monopoly of violence as controlling war. Montesquieu was less sure. He believed that "as soon as man enters into a state of society, he loses the sense of his weakness; equality ceases, and then commences the state of war." But he could not escape the logic of war of his own day. In order to manage war, he had to define it, and his definition was still one determined by the need to possess: "the object of war is victory; that of victory is conquest; and that of conquest

preservation."[3]

Tactically, eighteenth-century warfare was played out less often on the open battlefield and more through the medium of siege warfare. If the point of war was to master territory, then Louis XIV's engineer, Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633-1707), was the supreme practitioner of the day. He made his reputation in the conduct of siege warfare, but his lasting legacy, still visible in the European landscape, was his work to consolidate what France had gained through a system of fortifications designed to form robust French frontiers. He is credited with upgrading the defences of 300 cities and towns, and created 37 totally new forts. So important did siege warfare become in the eighteenth century that many of those who thought about and practised warfare counselled against the use of battle in open field. Maurice de Saxe, Marshal of France and commander of the French army in the Netherlands in the War of Austrian Succession in 1745-48, was not overly impressed by the work of Vauban, but still wrote "I do not favour pitched battles, especially at the beginning of a war and am convinced that a skilful general could make war all his life without being forced into one."[4] The Duke of Marlborough may have acquired fame and fortune in a campaign of manoeuvre culminating in a decisive battle at Blenheim in 1704, but the war of Spanish succession continued for another nine years, and in that time Marlborough conducted more sieges than he fought battles. Frederick the Great's battlefield masterpiece, his defeat of the Austrians at Leuthen in 1757, was fought at the outset of the Seven Years War. It saved Prussia but it did not end the war, which carried on until 1763.

The perception of battle and what it could achieve was transformed in 1815: Waterloo seemed to validate the argument that victory, a tactical outcome, could be decisive at the strategic level. The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were bundled together by nineteenth-century military analysts in very different ways from the way in which we now see the Hundred Years War, the Thirty Years War, the Nine Years War or the Seven Years War. Rather than being seen as the "Twenty-Three Years War," a single war of exhaustion, they were treated as a series of independent campaigns, each culminating in a decisive battle, from Valmy in 1792 to Marengo in 1800, from Austerlitz in 1805 to Jena in 1806. Waterloo itself was the conclusion not to a long war but to a campaign that had lasted only a hundred days. The armies of Europe were persuaded that what they did on the battlefield determined the outcome of a war, not what the people did or suffered, and not economic exhaustion or popular uprising or revolutionary guerrilla war. Chronologically, Waterloo's status was unimpeachable: it consolidated a peace settlement which ensured comparative European order for all but a hundred years. But that peace rested on a longer and more widely experienced memory than the events of one day in June 1815: on the fear of revolution which war had promoted, and on the depredations and suffering which the French army had brought in its wake. There was a paradox here: if twenty-three years of conflict were a case against war, the perception of

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3 Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent (1st published 1748; New York, 1966), vol. 1, 5.

4 Maurice de Saxe, *My Reveries upon the Art of War*, quoted in Thomas R. Phillips, *Roots of Strategy: A Collection of Military Classics* (London, 1943), 161; see also 139. Saxe was writing in 1732, before he had held high command, although his book was not published until 1757, after his death in 1750.

Waterloo was an argument for the use of battle.

Waterloo formed the climax to Edward Creasy's best-seller, *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*, published in 1851 but required reading in innumerable editions for the next fifty years. The book began with Marathon, and showed the enduring influence of battles on what Creasy called "our own social and political condition." The idea of the decisive battle, that tactical success can shape strategic and political outcomes, cast a long shadow. It survived the First World War. Three veterans of that war, Basil Liddell Hart, J.F.C. Fuller and Cyril Falls, all distinguished military writers, contributed to the genre. In 1929 Liddell Hart wrote *The Decisive Wars of History: A Study in Strategy.* Although the book acknowledged the place of grand strategy, which was "to decide whether strategy should make its contribution by achieving a military decision or otherwise," that was not the focus of Liddell Hart's attention. His focus was on what he called "pure strategy," or the art of the general. He rejected the idea that the general's sole aim was battle, but he still left either the decisive battle or its threat at the heart of strategy: the general's "true aim is not so much to seek battle as to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not of itself produce the decision, its continuation by a battle is guaranteed to do so." He gave a list of decisive battles in history, in "almost all" of which "the victor had his opponent at a psychological disadvantage before the clash took place."[5] Waterloo was not among them but he still treated it as a decisive battle. He argued that well-conducted operations, characterised by what he called the "indirect approach," would culminate in a "decisive" outcome, and that would normally be on the battlefield. Waterloo was decisive for Liddell Hart, because Napoleon adopted what Liddell Hart called the direct approach and the Prussian commander, Blücher, the indirect one— or the "line of least expectation."[6]

The Decisive Wars of History proved to be Liddell Hart's most enduring work, regularly revised, rebranded as *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, and subject to a sustained attempt to make it relevant to the nuclear age in 1954. In that same year, Fuller re-launched his career as a military historian, with the first of what were to become three volumes called *The Decisive Battles of the Western World and Their Influence upon History;* it too has had a successful publishing history. Finally, a decade later, in 1964, Cyril Falls, formerly professor of the history of war at Oxford and an erstwhile official historian of the First World War, edited a glossy volume, *Great Military Battles*.

Even more revealing of the lessons derived from the wars of 1792-1815 were nineteenth-century readings of Clausewitz's *On War*. The central preoccupation of *On War* is less the relationship between war and policy and more that between battle and war, or between tactics and strategy. Clausewitz's definition of strategy as the use of the battle for the purposes of the war understood the task of strategy as being to convert tactical into strategic success. The side which held the advantage at the end of the battle had to exploit it by pursuing and annihilating the enemy. In other words, Clausewitz did not claim that battle was decisive in itself. He had fought with the Russians against the French at Borodino in 1812 and had seen how what today are called "symmetrical forces" could negate each other. But many nineteenth-century

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5   B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Decisive Wars of History: A Study in Strategy* (London, 1929), 144, 153-4.

6   Ibid, 122.

military theorists inverted Clausewitz's argument. They said that the aim of manoeuvre was not to exploit the battle after it had been fought and so achieve a decision; instead the aim was to bring the enemy to battle because the battle was itself decisive.

Colonial warfare encouraged this sort of thinking. The native populations in countries outside Europe possessed strategic advantages: they knew the terrain and the climate and they were likely to be more resistant to local diseases and infections. European armies offset their strategic inferiority with the tactical advantages of discipline, order and firepower. So the key message of manuals like Charles Callwell's *Small Wars* (first published in 1896) was the need for the colonial power to seek battle as soon as possible, in other words to use tactical advantages to overcome strategic disadvantages.

Because the enemy would probably lack the form and discipline of a European army, he would prefer guerrilla war to seeking battle. So the colonial army had to achieve victory not by destroying such order as the enemy forces possessed, as had happened in the pursuit of an enemy army after a Napoleonic battle, but by killing them. Clausewitz had used the word *Vernichtung*, or annihilation, to describe what happened to an army in the pursuit after a battle. He made clear that what he meant to convey was the process by which an army became a rabble and so ceased to exist. Today, however, *Vernichtung* carries connotations of genocide. Isabel Hull called her study of the German campaign in south-west Africa (present-day Namibia) in 1904 *Absolute Destruction*, because there—in a non-European context—the German army did embark on the whole-sale eradication of the Herero people. Hull sees a link between what happened in Namibia and what the German army went on to do to the civilian populations in Belgium and northern France at the outset of the First World War.[7] The connection is tendentious: other European armies that waged colonial war did not commit atrocities in Europe, and one army which had no extra-European colonial experience, Austria-Hungary's, brought terror to Serbia in 1914. More important in their own thinking was a distinction all European armies made in connection with colonial warfare: they differentiated between what they called a civilised enemy, that was an enemy who respected the laws of war and took prisoners, and an uncivilised enemy, who did not. After he retired as chief of the Prussian general staff at the end of 1905, Alfred von Schlieffen wrote a series of studies of Hannibal's victory over the Romans at Cannae in 216 BC. This was another decisive battle which did not actually decide the war, but it did embody Schlieffen's idea of a battle of annihilation. Schlieffen's point was that such a battle of annihilation was still possible, although clearly it would be fought under different conditions from Cannae. One of those differences (and he was of course referring to European warfare against "civilised" opponents) was that "capitulations have taken the place of slaughters."[8]

By 1914 many twentieth-century generals had come to believe, in a way that many eighteenth-century generals had not, that battle was inherently decisive and that strategy existed to make possible a tactical decision, not to exploit the tactical events which constituted

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[7]   Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction; Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca NY, 2005).

[8]   *Alfred von Schlieffen's Military Writings* (London, 2003), ed. and trans. Robert T. Foley, 210.

fighting. So the key was to get the enemy to commit himself to battle. Both sides set out to do that in the First World War, but no decision resulted. Instead tactics trumped strategy. When the war ended in 1918, it did so with a whimper more than a bang, without a decisive military outcome in the sense that had been understood before the war. The German army was still in France, intact and claiming it was undefeated; it was certainly not annihilated in either Carl von Clausewitz's or Isabel Hull's sense. It was therefore hard for traditional strategy to see the connections between the culminating events on the different fronts and the peace settlements negotiated at Versailles. This was particularly so in Germany's case but it applied even where it could be argued that there had been decisive battles, Vittorio Veneto in Italy, Mosul in Mesopotamia and Megiddo in Palestine.

So by the 1930s the link between the battlefield and the peace settlement had been broken. This was not just the product of the German army's argument, that it had not been defeated on the battlefield. It was also fed more widely, beyond Germany, by the sense that the victory of 1918 had not led to peace. This frustration with the failed ambitions of the 1919 peacemakers underpinned the adoption of unconditional surrender in the Second World War. Unconditional surrender may have been a formula which held together an alliance possessed of incompatible post-war objectives, but its drivers were as much retrospective as prospective. As Paul Kecskemeti put it in 1958, "Instead of planning to settle the problems germane to World War II, they [the allies] resolved to end it by doing everything that would have been needed to prevent it from breaking out."[9]

Unconditional surrender was a formula that endeavoured to roll together the military process of capitulation on the battlefield and the political decision to end the war. It was in some ways a reversion to the patterns of ancient and medieval warfare. The challenge which it confronted was the lack of a political actor who was legitimate in the eyes of the allies and with whom they could therefore deal, even assuming the Germans or Japanese were ready to negotiate. In the ancient world this political impasse would have been resolved by the destruction of the enemy's fighting capacity, by *Vernichtung*, or annihilation, by the triumph of the military means of war over its political. However the two world wars do not provide much evidence that mass surrender was, in its own right and independently of other variables, sufficient to cause state collapse.[10]

By the end of the eighteenth century, individual belligerents were beginning to acquire rights. A prisoner of war was no longer the possession of his captor but had his own status. He was to be fed and accommodated during the war, and returned to his home at the war's end. This principle was acknowledged by the leaders of the French Revolution, and was embodied in the Lieber code in the American Civil War, the Brussels rules of 1874 and the Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907. It potentially changed the relationship between the commander and those whom he led, giving the latter the opportunity, if they could, to renegotiate the terms on which they fought. In the First World War, French soldiers, told to fight to the last man and the last

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[9]   Paul Kecskemeti, *Strategic Surrender: The Politics of Victory and Defeat* (Stanford, 1958), 238.

[10] Niall Ferguson, "Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War: Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat," *War in History,* 11 (2004): 148-92. puts the opposite argument, and sees surrender as decisive in the ending of both wars.

round, did not do so, and their generals accepted that fact. What was required was the need to have made a decent showing, not to have followed orders literally.[11] Other forms of collusion between commanders and those they commanded relaxed the code of courage and obedience. After the French army mutinied in 1917, their commander-in- chief, Philippe Pétain, imposed punishments which were less severe than those meted out earlier in the war, and sought to conciliate more than dragoon his men. His British colleague, Douglas Haig, similarly realised that he could not expect a citizen army made up of conscripts to adhere to the disciplinary norms of the pre-war regular army: as the war progressed, the British army, like the French, carried into effect proportionately fewer death sentences for desertion in the face of the enemy. In the German army, precisely because the law demanded death for desertion, without (as in the British case) scope for leniency, military courts preferred to try soldiers on the lesser charge of absence without leave.[12] In the Second World War, some commanders went one stage further, actually leading their armies into captivity in ways that had not been seen since the ritual surrenders of cities in the age of Vauban. At Stalingrad Friedrich Paulus did so in 1943, much to Hitler's fury, and so did the British general, Arthur Percival, at Singapore in 1942.

Collective surrender avoided the useless waste of life and was rationalised on this basis. It was deemed prudential and could even be honourable, at least on humanitarian, if not national, terms. Those who did not surrender, like the Japanese in the Second World War, were no longer deemed courageous, as were the 300 Spartans who had died holding the pass at Thermopylae against the Persians in 480 BC, but fanatical and even sub-human. They were denigrated by their enemies, not lauded.[13] But mass surrenders, including those at Stalingrad and Singapore, were not in themselves decisive for the outcome of the war. The same point can be made about the First World War. What was remarkable was how an army could be defeated in a "battle of annihilation" but its nation could still fight on: in Russia's case after the defeat of its 1st and 2nd armies at Tannenberg in 1914 or after its territorial and manpower losses in the "great retreat" in 1915; in Italy's after the Austro-German breakthrough at Caporetto in October 1917; or even in Britain's, given the very high proportion of prisoners of war as opposed to killed and wounded among the casualties suffered by the 5th army when the Germans attacked on the Somme on 21 March 1918. Manpower loss on the battlefield sufficiently great to be described "annihilating" and even "decisive" in purely military terms did not translate into political effect. The collapse of the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1940 or the high numbers of those who deserted from the British 8th army in the summer of 1942 did not prevent Britain ending up on the winning side in the Second World War. By contrast the Japanese rarely surrendered but still lost.

When the medieval economic historian, Marc Bloch, addressed the defeat of France in 1940 – yet again a decisive German victory which did not in fact decide the outcome of the war as a whole – he called it a "strange defeat." He equated individual surrender with the surrender of the nation. Bloch was a Frenchman, French patriot and French nationalist, a man

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[11]   Leonard Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division During World War I* (Princeton, 1994).

[12]   Christoph Jahr, *Gewohnliche Soldaten. Desertion und Deserteure im Deutschen und Britischen Heer 1914-1918* (Göttingen, 1998).

[13]   John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (London, 1986).

for whom the nation in arms was a living reality (he had served France in two world wars). For him the surrender followed not from the annihilation of the army but from a collective decision by the French people. Herein was the other approach which could resolve the political impasse created by unconditional surrender. The people, rather than the government, could be treated as the legitimate party to surrender. The idea of collective responsibility rested as surely on the democratising legacy of the French Revolution as do the legal rights of prisoners of war, captured performing their military duty as citizens. But it also assumed the capacity of strategic effects in war either to separate the people from their government so that they could act independently, or to ensure that they could bring overwhelming pressure to bear on their government, even to the point of revolution.

After 1918 many Germans, supported by several British commentators, including Liddell Hart, argued that the allied blockade of Germany had precipitated the German revolution of November, and that the revolution was what had caused the defeat of Germany. Both were and remain hotly debated propositions, but they suggested that the German people had been persuaded by the effects of the war to topple an autocratic regime in order to replace it with a government that was peace-minded and even potentially democratic. Herein was a different notion of the relationship between war and revolution from that entertained after 1815: then the French revolution was seen to have promoted and intensified war, rather than stopped it in its tracks.

Much allied propaganda in the First World War rested on the presumption that the Kaiser, helmeted and moustached, was the embodiment of German militarism, whereas the German people were potentially liberal democrats. Given that the socialists had formed the largest party after the Reichstag elections in 1912, even if they had not won an overall majority, the presumption was not without foundation. In the Second World War, the strategic bombing offensive, like the blockade in the First World War, used a similar mixture of stick and fairly inedible carrot. The German people were to be persuaded through the bombing of their homes and cities to become angry not with the allies, who had inflicted terrible suffering on them, but with the man indirectly responsible for the allied actions, Hitler himself. In both world wars inadequate allied understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between government and people rested on preconceptions that were as culturally conditioned and as driven by uncertain intelligence as those that shaped allied behaviour and expectations in relation to Iraq in the wars of both 1990-91 and 2003-11, and to Afghanistan in the war waged there since 2002. The bonds between Hitler, the German army and the German people proved much more resilient than any of the calculations resting on the presumption either of a generals' coup or of a popular uprising directed against the regime.

As the Cold War became entrenched, the perception grew that the pursuit of unconditional victory had not in fact produced a worthwhile peace in 1945. It converged with the implications for the conduct of war of the adoption of nuclear weapons. By the mid-1950s the possibility of an all-out nuclear exchange suggested that a future war would produce no victory that was worth the name for either side, let alone leave in place governments able to negotiate the terms of a peace settlement. The move from strategic effect to political resolution would itself be impossible because there would be no governments to oversee the move from military to political outcomes.

As a result the just war tradition became less focused on just cause and more on right effect. Could you claim, if and when you embarked on a war, that you would leave the world in a better place when the war was over? Most strategic thinkers of the nuclear age answered no, but that response in itself energised those who argued for the need for a concept of victory within a nuclear war. If it were the case that much of nuclear deterrence theory rested on foundations that were immoral, because it could not imagine a right effect emerging from the actual use of nuclear weapons, then the solution was not to abandon nuclear deterrence but to find a form of nuclear war which produced a positive outcome. Moreover, deterrence had to rest on a credible threat to go to war to be truly effective. Finding a way for nuclear weapons to deliver right effect would therefore also make them more useable and so would enhance deterrence.[14]

It would be easy to draw a straight line from the 1950s to the present day. Doubts about the validity of victory within war have outlasted the end of the Cold War and the declining salience of nuclear weapons, and have been projected onto the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Victory there has been defined in terms of creating conditions sufficiently secure to enable the intervening powers to get out. The phrase, an "exit strategy," itself confuses means and ends. Surely an exit cannot be the political object of the war? If it cannot be, an exit strategy creates uncertainty as to what the real objective is. On 24 October 2011 Oliver Letwin, minister of state in the British Cabinet Office, was asked about the government's strategy in Afghanistan, when giving evidence to the United Kingdom's Joint Parliamentary Committee on the National Security Strategy. He responded that it was a matter of balancing the need to help the Afghans themselves to stabilise their country and "on the other side, the extent to which our presence might become part of the problem rather than part of the solution." So the resulting strategy was expressed in terms a timetable, not of British interests in Afghanistan or Pakistan: "We balanced those out and came to the view that we had to set a date that was not very far out but, on the other hand, was far enough so that it could be done in an orderly and proper fashion."[15] An answer which had begun with a reasonable strategic objective, the stabilisation of Afghanistan, had moved to a different objective, the most sensible timing of British withdrawal. An exit might make for conflict termination for the intervening powers but it did not amount to conflict resolution for the inhabitants of Afghanistan.

The goal of victory is too important within war for those who wage it to be comfortable with outcomes that ignore it. Even during the Cold War, NATO armies revived the concept in the 1980s, despite the presumption that conventional operations were only a step on the ladder to an eventual nuclear exchange. In non-nuclear war, and at the tactical level, gaining or holding ground, or winning a fire-fight when your own survival and the lives of your immediate comrades are at stake, remains as applicable today as it did on the beaches of Normandy. Here victory has meaning. In the United States army in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, and in north Germany as the British and German armies considered how to meet a massive Soviet invasion by operational counter-strokes, the tactical idea of victory had two purposes. First, it reinvigorated

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[14] Colin Gray, "Nuclear Strategy: The Case for a Theory of Victory," *International Security,* 4 (1979): 54-87; Gray and Keith Payne, "Victory is Possible," *Foreign Policy*, no. 39 (summer 1980): 14-27.

[15] Evidence taken 24 October 2011, Q. 101, published 1 November 2011.

the morale of NATO armies and air forces, particularly those of the United States, and secondly it gave them a positive form of war into which to sink their intellectual teeth. Its results became known as "airland battle" and in due course grew into a whole body of operational thought around the idea of manoeuvre warfare. Those concepts, designed to create counter-offensive options in northern Europe in the 1980s, were applied with stunning success in the first Gulf War in 1990-91, and were then refined and perfected in the 1990s particularly through the incorporation of advanced technologies. Successive constructs for the operational level of war followed, the "revolution in military affairs," "network-centric warfare," "transformation" and "effects-based operations." In May 2003, at what he concluded was the end of the second Gulf war, President George W. Bush was able to put the cap on this current of military thought by declaring "mission accomplished" from the flight deck of USS *Abraham Lincoln*.

In 2003, as in 2002 in Afghanistan, a short campaign had been crowned with a decisive victory. Iraq seemed set to join the German wars of unification of 1866 and 1870, the war in the Falklands in 1982 or even the Kosovo campaign of 1999 as an example of how war could fulfil the ends of policy, at least for the victors. In practice victory understood in military sense had trumped a proper appreciation of its strategic outcomes. The same confusion also dogged Bush's approach to the "global war on terror." By October 2005, when it was clear that the mission in Iraq had not in fact been accomplished, and when the mistake of conflating operational brilliance with political effect was recognised by most observers, it was time to recalibrate the strategic narrative. But Bush still applied to the war on terror vocabulary appropriate to the Second World War. "Against such an enemy," he said, invoking in the minds of his audience ideas like total war and unconditional surrender, "there is only one effective response: we will never back down, never give in, and never accept anything less than complete victory."[16]

Such a conflation of military success and political surrender, a legacy of the notion of decisive battle, is not simply delusional in relation to the war on terror or in counter-insurgency campaigns; it is rare in all war. If anybody had read the thoughts of Chairman Mao to George W. Bush in 2005, the president would not have been listening. Rapid victory, Mao Tse-tung wrote in *On Protracted War* in 1938, "exists only in one's mind and not in objective reality… it is a mere illusion, a false theory."[17] Mao's war in China, a conflation of a national war against the Japanese and a civil war against the Kuomintang, lasted twenty-three years. For every short campaign culminating in decisive battle, there have been many more where the apparently decisive battle, as in May 2003, was followed by further campaigns and even ultimate defeat.

In protracted wars, exhaustion rather than annihilation becomes the means to strategic effect. The denouement can still be decisive, as it was for Mao or as it was for the allies in 1945. But if the exhaustion is mutual, the war more logically ends in negotiation, as each side moderates its terms to meet the demands of the enemy. More importantly, during the war the military means, because they become the indicators of relative advantage, of "progress" in the

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[16]   Jan Angstrom, "The United States Perspective on Victory in the War on Terrorism," in *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War*, eds. Jan Angstrom and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (London, 2007), 98.

[17]   Ian F. W. Beckett, "Victory, Counter-insurgency and Iraq," in *Understanding Victory,* eds. Angstrom and Duyvesteyn (London, 2007), 82.

war, can overtake the political objectives. Data collection, measurements designed to assess effectiveness, creates its own targets. On 6 January 1915, as Britain began its second year of fighting in the First World War, Sir Charles Callwell, the Director of Military Operations, reckoned that the German army's losses, because it was fighting on two fronts, were twice those of the allies, and concluded that it would not be able to sustain its current strength for more than six months. Callwell had produced this calculation on the orders of the secretary of war, Lord Kitchener, who then told the British war council that Germany would be exhausted by early 1917.[18] Callwell's memorandum was just the beginning: such calculations increasingly dominated allied counsels. The best known of the British army's trench newspapers, *The Wipers Times*, satirised what came to be called the strategy of attrition. Assuming a total fighting population in Germany of 12 million, that of them 8 million were dead or being killed, and that 1 million were in the navy, it concluded that only 3 million had to be accounted for. "We can write off 250,000 as temperamentally unsuitable for fighting, owing to obesity and other ailments engendered by a gross mode of living. This leaves us 500,000 as the full strength. Of these 497,240 are known to be suffering from incurable diseases, of the remaining 600, 584 are Generals and Staff. Thus we find that there are 16 men on the Western Front. This number I maintain is not enough to give them even a fair chance of resisting four more big pushes, and hence the collapse of the Western Campaign."[19]

In not dissimilar ways, the metrics of the body count came to dominate the United States Army's presentation of its own success in Vietnam. The sort of wishful thinking lampooned by *The Wipers Times* created political pressures on the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam to inflate figures. Collecting accurate information on all aspects of the enemy's performance in a complex counter-insurgency campaign was a massive exercise; by 1967 the US Army in Vietnam was producing reports which totalled 14,000 pounds in weight each day. There was more information than could be properly assimilated, so much so that the numbers of the enemy that tactical commanders reported their units as having killed became by default the most obvious objective measurement. But this was not the heart of the problem. The real issue was that the numbers of enemy dead, even if accurate and even if rising, were not necessarily the best index of progress in the war, particularly in areas of effectiveness that were not so susceptible to quantification.[20]

The land campaigns of the First World War and of the war in Vietnam were not exceptional in these respects in twentieth-century military history. Quantification is an obvious by-product of the application to war both of economic mobilisation and of the discipline of economics. In the war at sea in 1914-18, the efforts to measure the progress of economic warfare through the blockade of the Central Powers created similar pressure for statistics. The easily quantifiable effect was the decline in food imports available for the civil population. However, that bald figure in itself revealed nothing about the response of German agriculture to meet the deficit,

[18] David French, "The Meaning of Attrition, 1914-1916," *English Historical Review*, 103 (1988): 391-2.
[19] *The Wipers Times*, 26 February 1916, quoted by J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 1986), 288.
[20] Gregory A. Daddis, "The Problem of Metrics: Assessing Progress and Effectiveness in the Vietnam War" *War in History,* 19 (2012): 73-98, esp. 90-3.

the effectiveness of food distribution networks within Germany, or the possibility of altered diets with possible nutritional consequences. What was clear was the blockade of food imports did not stop the German soldier being first in the queue for food, and so economic warfare had little appreciable effect on the operations of the army in the field. "What, indeed, could be more frivolous," the British official historian of the blockade, A.C. Bell, wrote, "than that the British and French fleets; the whole diplomatic service of the allies; the bureaucracy of Whitehall; and the most talented men that could be recruited from our universities, law schools and business houses, should combine, for four whole years, to execute an operation of war against hospital patients; to increase the sufferings of phthistic, asthmatical and bronchitic persons; and to raise the number of women who miscarry in childbed?"[21]

Bell's answer to his own question was to deflect the argument from the quantifiable to the unquantifiable: the effect of the blockade was to be measured by its effects on the morale of the German nation. Advocates of air power have regularly found themselves falling back on comparable arguments. During the Second World War, the target list of German cities drawn up by Bomber Command fostered the illusion that science was being applied to strategy, and that a point would be reached when German industrial production would collapse. In fact it peaked in the summer of 1944, over two years after the air offensive had begun. The air power argument became a counter-factual one: that production would have been even higher without the bombing. In the aftermath of the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990, air power theorists argued that the first Gulf war could be won through aerial attack. The collapse of the Iraqi army within a hundred hours of the onset of ground operations seemed to confirm the argument that "Operation Desert Storm" had delivered its objectives. It had not, in that it had not decapitated the Iraqi government, and it had not destroyed a field army, both claims advanced at various stages of its planning and execution, but debunked by the official *Gulf War Air Power Survey* in 1993. The theorists of air power responded by following Bell's precedent: they abandoned the use of metrics, and assessed the effect of Desert Storm in terms of collapsing morale.

In the war in Afghanistan the figures for poppy production and the numbers of Taleban leaders killed in attacks by special forces or by unmanned aerial vehicles were used in similar ways. They created targets whose destruction provided indications of success in their own right, and so the means to wage war became ends in themselves. As they did so, they shaped the political objectives and the final outcome of the war. Once again, war – and particularly protracted war – came to master policy.

Whoever imagines that Clausewitz's norm, that war is the continuation of policy by other means, reflects a consistent reality has not read much military history. If states or any other organisations go to war in order to fulfil specific policy objectives, then they need to be much more aware than they ever appear to be that war typically changes policy. Even if wars are decided in short order, very rarely are they continuations of the policies which brought them into being, particularly if the terms on which they end are used as criteria. What is at

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[21]   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* (London, 1937; published 1961), 673.

stake here is not what Clausewitz wrote, but our selective and ill-applied understanding of it. Clausewitz was not primarily addressing the causes of war. His focus was on the inter-active and dynamic relationship between war and policy once war had begun. His anxiety, and one which those who aspire to employ war in the pursuit of policy should share, was to direct war so that it would of use. The fact that war is bloody and destructive is a very good reason for being cautious about beginning a war. However, once we are engaged in war, its costs are precisely what behove us to focus on its utility— to apply it for the pursuit of policy, and so to bend its inherent chaos towards rational objectives.

The great crisis in Clausewitz's life, or at least in his life as a military theorist, came in 1827, when he realised that the foundation stone of his theory, his own military experience in a war of national survival for Prussia, and what he called the "absolute" wars of Napoleon, was not the only conflict that had occurred in the history of mankind. Other wars, including those in which his father had fought under Frederick the Great's command, showed different characteristics. So his theory of war needed to encapsulate more limited and contained forms of war. The resolution of this crisis was a more mature theory, that identified two forms of war, and gave them a common identity through their shared relationship to policy. Clausewitz was one of the first writers to formulate a theory of limited war, and he inspired both Julian Corbett in Britain before the First World War, and then Robert Osgood in the United States after the Korean War. The latter's arguments underpinned the United States's initial commitment to Vietnam, and consequently defeat there discredited them.

As a result neither the United States not its allies have really appreciated that they have been fighting limited wars ever since. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been geographically confined, and also constrained in terms of resource commitments and levels of national mobilisation. Less clear is whether they have been limited in their political objectives. They have been presented as part of a global war on terrorism and universalised as struggles for democracy, liberal values and human rights. Because their objectives have been far greater than the means that the allied governments have been prepared to devote to them, the conduct of the wars has become incoherent. Policy has not been able to provide a unifying and directing influence, and so the wars themselves have been even more influential in shaping policy than they might naturally have been.

The challenge for the western world is whether it can develop an understanding of war that is other than existential, that moves on from a vocabulary that is still locked in the legacies of the two world wars and the Cold War. For many in the west the war in Afghanistan was a war for the promotion of beliefs we hold to be central to our humanity, those of religious freedom, legal rights and political liberalism. These beliefs elevated the necessity of the war and so seemed to make it a continuation of policy. But it was just that elevation, manifested in the focus on the just war tradition, and specifically on *ius ad bellum*, which radicalised the west's reasons for fighting, made it hard to negotiate or compromise, or even to find an "exit strategy" and which perversely ensured that war continued to direct policy. Our need is not to renounce war as a political tool, but to think through with much greater rigour and pragmatism the possible consequences of fighting, recognising that war is not a unilateral use of force, but a reciprocal exchange which possesses its own dynamic, and to whose evolution we must pay

constant and sustained critical attention. This is not just a political necessity; it is also a moral obligation, for only thus can we recognise the implications of our actions for the achievement of right effect. If we use war to try to make the world a better place, then that is the doctrine which should govern our deliberations and the decisions which flow from them.