



## **DEMOCRACIES AND SMALL WARS**



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## **Democracies and Small Wars**

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Insurgent actions are similar in character to all others fought by second-rate troops: they start out full of vigour and enthusiasm, but there is little level-headedness and tenacity in the long run.

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, VI:26



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Small wars go by many names: new wars, asymmetric wars, insurgencies, low intensity conflict, complex emergencies, and so on. Although statistically most wars are “small,” they have been relatively neglected compared to major conflicts, particularly when democracies are participants. There may be good reasons for this, but it is also true that, in recent years, Canada, as other democratic regimes, has been involved in small wars – in Bosnia and Afghanistan, for example. This paper analyses the characteristics of small wars and why, historically, democracies have been comparatively inept at fighting them. This is both a theoretical and a practical problem and the paper draws together reflections on this subject-matter from both civilian strategists and military practitioners. So long as Canada and other democracies are engaged in small wars, the political and military problems discussed in this paper will be present.

## **SOMMAIRE**

Les petites guerres se présentent sous plusieurs dénominations : nouvelles guerres, guerres asymétriques, séditions, conflits de faible intensité, urgences complexes et ainsi de suite. Même si, au point de vue statistique, la plupart des guerres sont « petites », elles ont été relativement négligées à comparer aux conflits majeurs, particulièrement quand ce sont des démocraties qui en sont les participants. Il peut y avoir de bonnes raisons pour qu'il en soit ainsi, mais il est également vrai que, ces dernières années, le Canada, comme d'autres régimes démocratiques, a participé à de petites guerres – en Bosnie et en Afghanistan, par exemple. Cette étude analyse les caractéristiques des petites guerres et les raisons pour lesquelles, sur un plan historique, les démocraties ont été comparativement maladroites à les mener. C'est un problème à la fois théorique et pratique sur lequel l'article rassemble des réflexions que nous offrent des stratèges civils et des praticiens militaires. Aussi longtemps que le Canada et les autres démocraties se verront engagés dans des petites guerres, nous resterons en présence des problèmes politiques et militaires discutés dans cet article.

## PREFACE

It pays to begin with Clausewitz. If Chinese were accessible to me, it might pay to begin with Sun Tsu, but one way or another, for a political scientist, it pays to begin with a philosopher, and when the topic is war, at least in the west, that means Clausewitz. After all, his great book was called *On War* not *On Early Nineteenth-Century Warfare* or *Why Napoleon had to be Stopped*. The implicit claim of his title was, therefore, that it described a treatise on war per se, whether conducted by states, by hordes, or by the United Nations. In the language of political science Clausewitz provides a clear conceptual framework regarding the subject-matter of this paper: how governments, including democracies, fight small wars. We begin therefore with a brief summary of the enduring elements of Clausewitz's argument and consign to the appendix an analysis of the consequences of forgetting or neglecting his views. This section is followed by a discussion of what small wars are (along with several cognate terms) and the implications of the broader question of why democracies, generally speaking, have fought them badly. A final section, which borrows its title from Chernyshevsky and Lenin, deals with lessons learned from the preceding analysis and with what might be called an emerging consensus on fighting small wars. This section is followed by an analysis of how this theory has been put into effect in Iraq. The paper ends with a few conclusions and recommendations.

I would like to thank David Bercuson for his critical remarks on an earlier version of this paper as well as the three other readers for CDFAI. I have found their remarks very helpful and have followed their suggestions in many (if not all) places. I would also like to thank the Donner Canadian Foundation and especially Joe Donner Jr. for financial support for this and other projects.

Barry Cooper  
Calgary  
May, 2009

## 1. INTRODUCTION

What is a small war? Should the emphasis be placed on the adjective or on the noun? This is a source of considerable controversy. But we have to start somewhere; small wars are, today, in the west, something other than what is commonly or commonsensically known by the term war: organized, large-scale, violent conflict between men and machinery, constituting the armed forces of two or more belligerents, usually states, engaging in a massive and decisive event to settle a dispute in international affairs.

One can subtract one or more of the descriptive attributes of this commonsense understanding of war or, if you like, of “traditional” war and still observe a phenomenon that can be described as war, but the modifiers will be different. The controversy alluded to above concerns just what modifiers best describe the observed phenomenon. Granted, these conflicts are not what “traditional” wars are known and understood to be. How, then, should they be described? According to Angstrom’s list, some of the terms include:

“new and old wars,” “the third kind of war,” “uncivil wars,” “intrastate wars,” “resource conflict,” variants of “ethnic war,” “internal war,” “ideological civil wars,” “shadow wars,” “peoples’ wars,” “foreign internal defence,” “military operations other than war,” “terrorism,” “indirect wars,” “communal war,” “low-intensity conflicts,” “small wars,” “insurgencies,” “complex emergencies,” and many others.<sup>1</sup>

And there are others. During the Cold War it was common to speak of “limited wars” as just about any conflict short of a nuclear exchange, and that possibility, in turn, was often understood as a new kind of (potential) war. The connotations of each of them, at least for those who use them as terms of art, are often different. Some of these concepts are discussed in section three, but for the time being, and as a generic term, we will simply refer to “small wars.”

However specifically designated, contemporary small wars are distinguished in a number of respects from traditional wars. Perhaps the most obvious is that it is comparatively easy to distinguish winners and losers of traditional wars. The two conventional ways of indicating military victory independent of political purpose are first, to acquire and control territory. If you control the land you control its resources, law, and population. If the land is elevated, or if you control the skies, you control reconnaissance and information. If you control the sea, you control trade. In short, the battlespace<sup>2</sup> is simply physical. A second traditional measure of conventional military success is to have a preliminary (and a surviving) order of battle larger than your opponent’s – though, of course, there are occasions when battlefield victors have smaller surviving forces than those of the defeated. Even so, force size, composition, and capability in a context of attrition usually predicts success. Winning means having more left at

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Angstrom, “Introduction: Debating the Nature of Modern War,” in Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom, eds., *Rethinking the Nature of War* (London: Cass, 2005), 6.

<sup>2</sup> It is customary today to speak of battlespace rather than battlefield. For a discussion of this changed terminology see: Paul E. Funk, “Battle Space: A Commander’s Tool on the Future Battlefield,” *Military Review*, 73:12 (1993), 36-47; Frederick M. Franks, “Full Dimensional Operations: A Doctrine for an Era of Change,” *Military Review*, 73:12 (1993), 5-10.

the end of the fight. Neither measure seems to apply to the military aspect of contemporary small wars.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. ON WAR

The end of the Cold War led to a proliferation of theories about future wars and the future of war. Some of these are discussed in the appendix. Although Clausewitz did not mean by the term *kleine Kriege* precisely what is meant today by small wars, several well known texts in *On War* provide evidence of Clausewitz's continuing relevance to our understanding of small wars.<sup>4</sup>

For example, just prior to his famous description of the wondrous trinity, Clausewitz wrote that "war is more than a true [or mere] chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case" (*On War*, 89; emphasis added). At the very least we learn that war can adapt its "characteristics" or attributes in fundamental ways. In the balance of this paragraph and the next, Clausewitz described first the wondrous trinity – primordial violence and hatred, the play of fortune and creativity, and war as an instrument of policy subject to reason – and then its contemporary institutionalization in the people, the army, and the government (*On War*, 89). The three "tendencies," Clausewitz said, are both deep-rooted and variable, and his task is "to develop a theory that maintains a balance" among them – and here he introduced a famous image from physics – "like an object suspended between three magnets."<sup>5</sup> By implication, how these fundamental "tendencies" find expression or articulation in the world is secondary.

The consequence of this interpretation can be found in a second celebrated text from Book I, chapter one of *On War*, a passage that is perhaps even more often quoted than his remarks on the trinity from paragraph 28. Paragraph 24: "War is Merely the Continuation of Policy by Other Means." Here Clausewitz argued that war is not merely "an act of policy," but "a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means," namely organized violence, fighting. The "peculiar nature of its means," that is, combat, is "what remains peculiar to war." Finally, "the political intention [*Absicht*] is the purpose [*Zweck*], war is the means of gaining it, and never can the means be considered independent from the purpose" (*On War*, 86). Paragraph 26 asserted that "all wars can be considered acts of policy" and paragraph 27 drew out the implications. First, "war should never be thought of as something autonomous but always as an instrument of policy" (emphasis added). Second, this way of examining war will show "how wars must vary with the nature of their motives and with the nature of the situations that give rise to them." If both these implications are kept in mind, the most important decision a statesman and a commander must make concerns "the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature" (*On War*, 88). So far as the current topic is concerned, political leaders and their military commanders, in democracies or not, must never mistake a small war for a conventional or large one.

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<sup>3</sup> For details see Robert Mandel, "Defining Postwar Victory," in Jan Angstrom and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, eds., *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 13-45; Michael Howard, "When are Wars Decisive?" *Survival*, 41:1 (1999), 126-35.

<sup>4</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, tr. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Reference in the text to Howard and Paret's edition are given as *On War*, followed by the page number.

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough discussion, see Alan Beyerchen, "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War," *International Security*, 17:3 (1992), 59-90.

In Book Eight, chapter 6, part B, “War as an Instrument of Policy” (*On War*, 605), Clausewitz repeated in slightly different words what he had said in Book One. War is “a branch of political activity” and is “in no sense autonomous.” This is true first because “the only source of war is politics” and at the same time, war does not “suspend” politics when it occurs:

How could it be otherwise? Do political relations between peoples and between their governments stop when diplomatic notes are no longer exchanged? Is war not just another expression of their thoughts, another form of speech or writing? Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic.

If that is so, then war cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense (*On War*, 605).

By the “grammar” of war Clausewitz meant tactics, weapons, modes of fighting, and so on; the logic of war determines its purpose, which is political, as he has said in several different ways. Because no war is fought in order to fight a war, war itself has no internal logic, or, as he said in the quotation just given, if you fight in order to fight, the entire enterprise is “pointless.” The implication (it seems to me) is clear: all war, low or high intensity, big or small, can be understood within the Clausewitzian strategic paradigm though the grammar may vary. As he remarked on the following page, “all wars are things of the same nature” though in detail, as a consequence of any particular policy, wars can have quite different characters or characteristics (*On War*, 606). As a consequence considerable attention needs to be devoted to the political logic that governs any particular conflict.<sup>6</sup> The realm of political logic is governed by political purposes that are, in principle, rational, and is put into motion by rulers and commanders.<sup>7</sup> That is, precisely, what connects war to policy and to reason. Strategic success, therefore, means the creation of a regime acceptable, if not favourable, to the battlefield victor. This Clausewitzian dictum applies to small as well as conventional wars.

### 3. SMALL WARS

#### a. Introduction

Several reasons have been advanced by scholars to account for the relative neglect of small wars during the Cold War, from “strategic culture” to the academic backgrounds of the

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<sup>6</sup> This observation would apply to tribal or clan war as well as war between or among states, which Clausewitz called “civilized,” *On War*, 86. The reason is not simply that, generally speaking, there are warrior classes or castes among clan and tribal groups but that clans and tribes are themselves political organizations. They are no more to be regarded as “blind natural forces” than are empires or polises, neither of which are states. For further discussion along these lines see Jan Willem Honig, “Strategy in a Post-Clausewitzian Setting,” in Gerd de Nooy, ed., *The Clausewitzian Dictum and the Future of Western Military Strategy* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1997), 110ff; M.L.R. Smith, “Guerrillas in the Mist: Reassessing Strategy and Low Intensity Warfare,” *Review of International Studies*, 29 (2003), 19-37.

<sup>7</sup> The political rationality of war is what makes “coercibility” possible and thus allows war to be understood as a form of bargaining. See Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 5. An absence of coercibility and the impossibility of bargaining, as with various kinds of ideological movements, poses a number of additional theoretical as well as practical problems. I have discussed some of them in *New Political Religions: Or an Analysis of Modern Terrorism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), ch. 1.

individuals who developed deterrence theory.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the strategic culture developed to think about nuclear war, there remains a more general historical resistance among the combatant leadership of major powers to engage in small wars. Now, of course, not all major powers are democracies (and we shall consider this problem below) but a similar issue arises insofar as small wars, at least for one side, are “wars of choice” in the sense that, generally speaking, they do not involve what are now called existential interests, that is, national survival. It is also true that the element of choice can be obscured when any particular conflict is declared to involve prestige, pride, self-respect, and so on. Notwithstanding the above qualifications, “conventional” war is widely and properly understood to be force-on-force and more or less symmetric as well as being a rational instrument of the state. However, statistically speaking, only about 20 percent of wars since 1945 have been interstate wars.<sup>9</sup> Smith explained the high incidence of small wars and their relative neglect in the strategic studies literature as a result of a professional preference for studying and analyzing “conventional” wars so called “not because they were the convention – but because they were seen as ‘more important.’ But, one might ask, more important to whom?” The question answers itself: they were more important to us. Moreover the historical reason for this focus is also clear: “twentieth-century warfare that culminated in the titanic struggle for survival in World War II. It is this that accounts for the state-oriented, means-addicted, strategic mentality that was ill at ease in comprehending anything that did not encompass the massive clash of organized armed forces.” This “military-industrial legacy,” as Smith termed it, was easily transferred to the Cold War.<sup>10</sup>

To put matters even more simply, as Max Boot said, the generals who led big armies in big wars are remembered, but “who now remembers Smedley Butler, John Rogers or J. Franklin Bell?”<sup>11</sup> And yet, small wars “always have outnumbered interstate wars” even if that fact is ignored by “mainstream strategic studies and international relations thinking for much of the Cold War years in favour of supposedly more important problems.”<sup>12</sup> If, as Clausewitz argued, there is only one meaningful category of war, namely war itself, what, then, is the significance of the adjective in the term “small wars”? What, as Machiavelli might say, are the modes and orders of small wars?

## **b. Small Wars**

“Terminology,” said Frank Hoffman, “has been a problem for some time.”<sup>13</sup> So let us begin at the beginning. In 1896 C.E. Caldwell defined a small war from a European and imperial perspective as “all campaigns other than those where both sides consist of regular troops”

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<sup>8</sup> See Carnes Lord, “American Strategic Culture in Small Wars,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 3 (1992), 210. See also Eliot A. Cohen, “Constraints on America’s Conduct of Small Wars,” *International Security*, 9:2 (1984), 151-81. See also Bernard Brodie, *Small Wars Manual* (Washington: USMC, 1990), 1-11-19.

<sup>9</sup> K.J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21-4. See also N.P. Gleditsch, P. Wallenstein, M. Eriksson, M. Sollenberg, and H. Strand, “Armed Conflict, 1946-2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39:5 (2002), 615-37.

<sup>10</sup> M.L.R. Smith, “Guerrillas in the Mist: Reassessing Strategy and Low Intensity Warfare,” *Review of International Studies*, 29 (2003), 30-1. See also Douglas Porch, “Introduction to the Bison Books Edition” of C.E. Caldwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* [1896] 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), xvii.

<sup>11</sup> Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 282. All three were successful Marine and U.S. Army commanders prosecuting small wars in Latin America and the Far East.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, “Guerrillas in the Mist,” 34.

<sup>13</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, “Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Nontraditional Wars,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28:6 (Dec. 2005), 921.

which is to say “operations of regular armies against irregular, or comparatively speaking irregular forces.” That is, small wars involve “campaigns in which at least one side of the conflict does not employ regular forces as its principle force and does not fight conventionally.” As a consequence, “the conduct of small wars is in certain respects an art by itself, diverging widely from what is adapted to the conditions of regular warfare.”<sup>14</sup> From the beginning, therefore, the assumption was that small wars were not a “lesser included case” of large or conventional war. The qualification was made that Caldwell viewed these conflicts from a state-centric European perspective. On their own terms, the armies of the Zulus or the Apaches were “regular” armies, and British wars against Indian princes often looked like “regular” or “conventional” wars even by European standards. Even so, from a European (and North American) perspective the main point is that an ability to fight a big “regular” war does not necessarily include an ability to fight a small one.<sup>15</sup>

The *Small Wars Manual*, published by the United States Marine Corps (1940), retained a state-centric focus. A small war was: “The ordinary expedition of the Marine Corps which does not involve a major effort in regular warfare against a first-rate power.” Such expeditions are typically “undertaken under executive authority, wherein a military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our nation.” Finally, whereas the point of a big war is the destruction of hostile forces, the point of a small one is “to establish and maintain law and order by supporting or replacing the civil government in countries or areas in which the interests of the United States have been placed in jeopardy.”<sup>16</sup>

These definitions, taken from British and American experience, are certainly compatible with the recently released Canadian document, *Counter-Insurgency Operations*,<sup>17</sup> despite the focus of the latter on actual military and political conduct. In all these documents the first essential attribute or characteristic is that, whether the enemy is a state or a non-state, small wars are asymmetric. But what does that mean?

### c. Asymmetric War

A conventional definition of asymmetric war proposed by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff is as follows: “Attempts to circumvent or undermine an opponent’s strength while exploiting his weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the opponent’s usual mode of operations.”<sup>18</sup> But as Roger W. Barnett pointed out, “emphasizing one’s strengths and exploiting an enemy’s weaknesses is what strategy is all about.” Or, as Isabelle Duyvesteyn observed, “war is always, in one way or another, asymmetric, otherwise there would never be winners or losers in war. In fact, belligerents actively seek to establish asymmetry to achieve victory in war. Asymmetry thus touches on the essence of war.”<sup>19</sup> Barnett provided a more

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<sup>14</sup> Caldwell, *Small Wars*, 21, 23. The original subtitle was not *Their Principle and Practice* but *A Tactical Handbook for Imperial Soldiers*.

<sup>15</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, “Constraints,” 167.

<sup>16</sup> *Small Wars Manual*, 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> Ottawa: National Defence, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Franklin B. Miles, “Asymmetric Warfare: An Historical Perspective.” (Carlisle: US Army War College, 1992), 2-3. See also Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Asymmetry and US Military Strategy: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2001); David L. Buttalo, *Defining Asymmetric Warfare* (Arlington: Association of the United States Army, Institute of Land Warfare, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Duyvesteyn, “Paradoxes of the Strategy of Terrorism,” in Angstrom and Duyvesteyn, eds., *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War*, 119.



precise qualification: “true asymmetries” are “those actions that an adversary can exercise that you either cannot or will not.”<sup>20</sup> He spent the balance of his book discussing the operational, institutional, legal, and moral constraints on possible conflict with the People’s Republic of China or on “unrestricted warfare” as Qiao Liang and Wang Xiansui, two colonels in the People’s Liberation Army, called it.<sup>21</sup>

However useful Barnett’s analysis is, at least by anticipating confrontation and potential conflict with China, that country is conventionally seen as a “near-peer competitor,” more likely to be an adversary in symmetric rather than asymmetric war. Even so, Barnett pointed to an essential element of asymmetry: an asymmetric adversary will act in ways that you cannot or will not. The implications of this characteristic, which we consider below particularly as they apply to democracies, have been spelled out at some length by Rod Thornton.<sup>22</sup>

Most armies are designed to fight mirror images of themselves, much as the CIA came to resemble the KGB. The great problem in describing asymmetric threats and asymmetric warfare is to convey a sense of difference that is not quite an opposite. In terms of medieval logic, we are looking for a contrary that does not contradict. The evolution of American definitions of asymmetric war indicates the complexity of the problem without quite pinning it down. The 1995 doctrinal *Joint Warfare* document referred to engagements between “dissimilar forces.”<sup>23</sup> Four years later, the *Joint Strategy Review*, a major strategic publication of the US Department of Defense, described “asymmetric approaches” as “attempts to circumvent or undermine US strengths while exploiting US weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from United States’ expected methods of operations.”<sup>24</sup> This definition was slightly more nuanced than the one advanced at the beginning of the decade quoted above, but still stressed the military rather than the political aspect of asymmetry.

In contrast, as Thornton and Barnett have pointed out, the British definition stressed conflict between a powerful modern state “with well equipped forces but limited national interest or public support and severe political and moral constraints,” and an enemy that can be characterized by “total commitment” and very little regard “for life and property.”<sup>25</sup> That is, the British version took account of British political constraints and their absence from likely asymmetric adversaries and not just military or operational differences. In short, Western military preponderance has been achieved by states that “have a back door left open,” namely the fact that they are constitutional democracies (*Asymmetric Warfare*, 20). As a result, every “war of choice” for a democracy is bound to involve enemies and threats that will be different from what democracies are used to and may well be different from each other. Thus, Thornton concluded, “we do not really need to define asymmetric warfare as much as to understand what it means” (*Asymmetric Warfare*, 21). So what, according to Thornton, does it mean?

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<sup>20</sup> Roger W. Barnett, *Asymmetrical Warfare: Today’s Challenge to U.S. Military Power* (Washington: Brassey’s, 2003), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Liang and Xiansui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, FBIS translation (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Thornton, *Asymmetric Warfare: Threat and Response in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). Page references given in parentheses in the text as *Asymmetric Warfare* followed by the page number.

<sup>23</sup> *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1995), IV, 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> *Joint Strategy Review* (Washington: CJCS, 1999), 2.

<sup>25</sup> *British Defence Doctrine*, JWPO-01 (London: HMSO, 1996), 2.12.

First of all such warfare involves novelty. In asymmetric wars, old weapons systems have new missions – fighter aircraft may be used for ground support not air dominance, for example. There are new adversaries and new criteria for engagement stemming from their status as wars of choice, which is to say wars where the political leadership has determined that fundamental national interests are absent. In particular, where vital national interests are said to be peripheral to the mission, democracies especially (but not exclusively) are casualty-averse. If force protection really is “job one,” then, whatever job two may be, not much fighting initiated by the armies of democratic regimes is likely. This is an issue to which we return in sections four and five.

The most interesting aspect of asymmetric war is less concerned with firepower differences or rules of engagement but asymmetry in thinking. Specifically, what we consider to be sources of strength an asymmetric opponent sees as a source of vulnerability. Vulnerability is not the same as weakness. Of course, “actors are vulnerable where they are weak. However they may also be vulnerable at points that are indispensable to the maximization of their strength. What is perceived by the superior power to be a strength may in fact become a weakness.”<sup>26</sup> Turning strengths into vulnerabilities, said Thornton, “forms one of the fundamental bases of the thinking of the asymmetric warrior” (*Asymmetric Warfare*,13). The logic is that by looking for vulnerabilities, an asymmetric opponent transforms absolute weakness in a symmetric sense into relative weakness.

For example, information technologies (IT) are a major force multiplier for modern militaries. For an asymmetric adversary IT is a point of vulnerability. For instance, just-in-time delivery of 155mm shells is vulnerable to a cyber attack that results in 105mm shells being delivered. Moreover, the likelihood is that the attack would be undetected because it would be immediately understood as just another snafu.

Or consider the most technologically advanced (and technologically dependent) element of a modern military: air power. At the top of the pyramid are relatively few, but very expensive aircraft. B-2s in the USAF cost American taxpayers \$1.3B each. CC-17s and CF-18s in the Canadian Forces are cheaper but are still big ticket items. They may be hard to shoot down and are very efficient, but risks associated with putting them in harm’s way are also very high. The same is true, to a lesser extent, with F-16s, Harriers, A10s, and helicopters, especially if they are used for ground attack where they are vulnerable to relatively cheap anti-aircraft fire and man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS).

Or, consider the example of precision guided munitions (PGMs). In theory modern precision-guided, stand-off munitions can change the dialectic of killing and dying that the traditional soldier embodied. The asymmetries go considerably beyond that created at Omdurman by the Maxim gun. “Here,” wrote Münkler, “war sheds all the features of the classical duel situation and, to put it cynically, approximates to certain kinds of pest control.” To prevent such weapons turning battle into massacre, accurate targeting and legal approval of targets are required: “the classical army ethos, which for a long time was probably the most reliable obstacle to the conversion of fighting into massacre, has been supplanted by a combination of technical precision and legal control.”<sup>27</sup> Considered from the side of the asymmetric warrior, and ignoring for the time being the moral constraint of turning war into massacre, the great advantage,

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Pfaltzgraff and Stephen Wright, “The Spectrum of Conflict: Symmetrical or Asymmetrical Challenge,” in Richard Schultz and Robert Pfaltzgraff, eds., *The Role of Naval Forces in 21st Century Operations* (Washington: Brassey, 2004), 13.

<sup>27</sup> Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars*, tr. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 132.

accuracy, can relatively easily become a vulnerability. PGMs are used by technically advanced militaries to reduce collateral damage, but if they are electronically sent off course they do no damage. At least with carpet bombing some dumb iron bombs likely fell on target. Of course, powerful jammers can be detected by electronic warfare aircraft such as EA-6s, but they are scarce as well as expensive and probably not wisely used against cheap jammers.

Again because of their accuracy, PGMs can be deceived by dummy trucks, facilities, or weapons. This can be countered by using special operations forces as spotters, but doing so increases risk. In other words, the problem of risk in asymmetric war introduces a derivative, or second-order, symmetry: will. Democratic aversion to casualties, whether friendly or collateral, is a major political issue, as is discussed below. Here we would simply note that, given the accuracy of PGMs, hugging civilians or civilian infrastructure is the obvious asymmetric response. The effect may be to prevent an attack or merely to create a pause – and a pause undermines momentum. That is, sensitivity to casualties invites the response by asymmetric adversaries to risk civilians.<sup>28</sup> By the same token, asymmetric adversaries can undermine their own legitimacy by creating “humanitarian crises” that can then be used as justification for intervention by democracies. The expulsion of Kosovar Albanians by the Milosovic regime or the execution by Al-Qaeda in Iraq of moderate Sunnis in Anbar province come to mind.

One could summarize the significance of these examples with the observation that “the powerful tend not to worry about what the weak are thinking” (*Asymmetric Warfare*, 75). This may be acceptable in a conventional force-on-force symmetric conflict where both sides play by approximately the same rules, but it is a major strategic mistake in asymmetric war. Moreover, because it is often the result of the self-understanding of democracies as fair and decent regimes, democratic rectitude, a strength, can also be a vulnerability. To be clear about this last point: the first task for Western democracies today when embarking on an asymmetric conflict is to convince themselves that any given war is necessary, and then to convince everyone else that it is legal and that, once begun, it will be conducted legally.

Asymmetric warriors do not have this burden, of course. But the important feature, in this context, is that democracies tend to feel particularly good when they follow international law and indignant when their asymmetric opponents do not. This failure of imagination in refusing to contemplate how, for instance, international law appears to the asymmetric adversary, whatever it means to democracies, remains a failure (*Asymmetric Warfare*, 17).

Matters look rather different to an asymmetric adversary. Weak states and non-government actors in the post-Cold War world no longer receive hand-me-down heavy weaponry from Cold War participants along with their second-hand advice. Relatively weak state and non-state actors no longer even think about fighting democracies on the basis of conventional war using mass or mass fire. Hence they are driven to consider asymmetric alternatives, with the result that their militaries are increasingly unlikely to look like those of powerful states (*Asymmetric Warfare*, 16). At the same time their military conduct will increasingly be characterized by what Meigs called “operational idiosyncrasy.”<sup>29</sup> That is, weak asymmetric opponents are simply playing a different game. In place of high-tech equipment and fire power, the premise of an asymmetric adversary “is rooted in the fundamental precept that superior political will, when properly employed, can defeat greater economic and military power” (*Asymmetric Warfare*,

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Rip and James Hasik, *The Precision Revolution: GPS and the Future of Aerial Warfare* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 406.

<sup>29</sup> Montgomery C. Meigs, “Unorthodox Thoughts about Asymmetric War,” *Parameters*, 33:3 (Summer, 2003), 7.

156). As we shall see in the following section, democracies (and non-democracies as well) encounter significant problems when they attempt to match the will of asymmetric foes, though it can be done.

Thornton's tentative conclusion is, in this respect, rather melancholy. If asymmetric adversaries "play dirty," ignore international law, locate arms depots in hospitals or mosques, hide behind civilians, and so on, there is not much democracies can do: "they have to adhere to their self-imposed rules" (*Asymmetric Warfare*, 94). This may or may not be so; we will discuss the implications in the following two sections.

One conclusion, at any rate, seems inescapable: even if we leave democratic morality aside, the task of defeating an asymmetric foe is much more difficult when, as with some Islamist fundamentalists, the enemy is relatively insensitive to living or dying. It may be – for whatever reason – that his pain threshold, including that of the combatant (or non-combatant) civilians is higher than the ability of a regular military to inflict pain. And if your enemy is not subject to "compellence," to use a term of Thomas Schelling, then as noted above the problems of dealing with an asymmetric adversary are increased greatly.

#### **d. New Wars**

Mary Kaldor used the term "new war" to describe conflict often of sub-state entities during a period of globalization and the transformation of the state under its impact.<sup>30</sup> Her argument has been extended and refined by Herfried Münkler.<sup>31</sup> According to Münkler, there are, in addition to asymmetry, two additional novel attributes of war today. The first he called "de-statization" and the second he described as an increased autonomy of violence from politics. One of the great problems besetting "failed states" is that they are crushed between tribalization and globalization because their elites view the state apparatus as a vehicle for personal aggrandizement, not a source of duties. The state has always been a legal entity and classical interstate wars were bounded at the beginning and end by legal acts. Hence the traditional sequence: peace, crisis, war, resolution. New wars do not conform to that sequence. They have neither an obvious beginning nor a clear end. Instead of a peace treaty or even a peace agreement we find more or less continuous peace "processes" that do not conclude or end a confrontation. This, in turn, can occasionally and usually unexpectedly escalate into a conflict. As a result new wars tend to be unlimited both in the sense that the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is eroded and in the sense that any obvious spatial or temporal limit to the fluctuating intensity of violence tends to disappear.

Considered externally, small wars in the form of guerrilla operations, which severally speaking appear to be the defensive form of asymmetric war, have been ancillary to big war – as was true, for example, with the first so named guerrilla war, the peninsular campaign against Napoleonic France. Thus a "new war" can be seen as a small war conducted independently of any big one. The combatants, therefore, are easily confused with criminals; hence, the ambiguous status in law of the Guantanamo detention facility and the debates in mid-September, 2001 over whether the attack on the United States earlier that month was an act of war, akin to Pearl Harbor, or a criminal act. But even among those who strongly supported the latter view, few were foolish enough to think that dispatching a lawyer to serve papers on bin Laden was an option. In this context, incidentally, terrorism may be considered as the offensive form of asymmetric war.

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<sup>30</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Münkler, *The New Wars*. Page references are given in the text as *New Wars*, followed by the page number.

However that may be, for Münkler, what is new about new wars is that they sort themselves into two distinct categories: they are either economic or ideological. Both depend on the degradation, if not the disintegration, of the state. The economic new war combines in the warlord the figure of entrepreneur, politician, and fighter. The context of the failed state enables many people to make a living and others to gain great wealth, not as a concomitant of war, but as its purpose. The “logic” of war, in other words, has escaped state-centred politics.<sup>32</sup> Economic warlords derive their income from fighting and so from the collapse of the state – as in Somalia or Guinea-Bissau, for example. A failed state then gives them the opportunity to appropriate forcibly and more fully the profits of war whereas the costs, as is true for all profitable business enterprises, are externalized so far as possible onto the surrounding social environment – or what is left of it. Moreover, the conduct of economic war in a failed state is often conducted not by state armies or even state-backed militias, but by private military firms (PMFs) such as Blackwater today or Executive Outcomes a generation ago.<sup>33</sup>

“The longer the war lasts,” – and he had chiefly sub-Saharan Africa in mind – Münkler said, “the more the economies of violence appear to determine the actions of its main players, and the more the original motives are converted into resources for a war that has taken on an independent dynamic” (*New Wars*, 93). It is theoretically possible to integrate warlords into the world economy and transform killers into aggressive businessmen, but so long as such small wars are both cheap and lucrative, it is likely to remain what Münkler calls “disaggregated” below the state. Examples of such economic wars range across the world, from Somalia to the Balkans, from the Niger delta to Colombia; arguably it is one dimension of the war in Afghanistan as well.

What Münkler called “ideological” substate wars are not conducted for money and things associated with money, but typically in order to obey the will of God. These new wars, promoted by new political religions,<sup>34</sup> make integration into a commonsensical and economic reality all but impossible because the premise of such organizations as Aum Shinrikyo or al-Qaeda and its affiliates is the transfiguration of commonsensical reality.<sup>35</sup>

Considered from the perspective of ideological warriors, who as noted typically take the offensive, the purpose of a terrorist attack, given the asymmetric disposition of military force, remains the Clausewitzian objective of breaking the opponent’s political will: “In principle, then, those behind the terrorist attack put the question whether the adversary [in this instance, the democracy] is prepared to pay the same costs a second or third time round, and they do not unreasonably suppose that the enemy is not prepared to do so” (*New Wars*, 101). But they are wrong because they fail to notice that the “enemy,” that is, the Western democracies, does not mirror the homogeneity that they assume constitutes the ummah. Being articulated into several national states, the 2001 attack on New York and Washington was followed by attacks on Madrid and London, Bali and Mumbai, but the recipients of these attacks were not, by their own self-understanding a coherent “enemy” even though that is what they were to al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

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<sup>32</sup> See also Steven Metz, “New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding Twenty-first Century Insurgency,” *Parameters*, 37:4 (Winter 2007-8), 27.

<sup>33</sup> See P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> See Barry Cooper, *New Political Religions*.

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of the distinction between commonsense reality and its transformation into the “second reality” of the imagination, see Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, tr. and ed., Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), ch. 7.

This fundamental disjunction between the politically variable self-understanding of those who were attacked and the homogenous perception of them by the attackers, namely that they were all elements of the same enemy, coupled to the unquestionable (but ignored) expectation that a terrorist attack is bound to provoke a response;<sup>36</sup> hence, the use of terror by ideological new warriors is premised on the non-recognition of commonsensical reality. In short, ideologically inspired terrorist violence amounts to a magic means to transfigure reality. Like all such magical operations, it cannot work. The fight against absolute evil, or the Great Satan, namely, Western democracies, in order to fulfill the will of God precludes calculations of collateral damage regarding the innocent because there are no innocents.

Just as the economic new wars are conducted independently of a state-based political will, and thus may appear politically irrational, so too the ideological new wars have “developed into an independent strategy with no necessary connection to partisan warfare or other genuinely military modes of operation” (*New Wars*, 107). But as we have seen, in fact and as commonsense would anticipate, large-scale attacks on democracies, even in pursuit of unrealisable fantasies, are bound to provoke a response. What in *New Political Religions* I discussed in terms of a spiritual disorder, or pneumopathology, has the consequence of making a political resolution of an ideological war next to impossible. As was discovered during the course of World War II, the only option seems to be unconditional surrender. In the case of the Cold War, it was regime change in the USSR. This may not be the case with asymmetric war, even when ideological, as we discuss in section four.

#### e. 4GW

Fourth Generation War (4GW), can be understood as a specific sub-category of “new wars” and of asymmetric war. It is a notion that is usually associated with William S. Lind, and his collaborators, and with Thomas X. Hammes.<sup>37</sup> We will consider Lind’s version, which is not without its idiosyncrasies and enthusiasms.

The central, and useful question Lind et al. raise is that, since “third generation” or “maneuver” warfare was begun in 1918, should we not be thinking about fourth generation warfare? But what are these “generations”? First generation referred to line and column fighting with smooth-bore muskets accompanied by rigid drill. Second generation warfare maintained the linearity of the first but added rifled muskets, breech loaders, barbed wire, machine guns, and especially indirect artillery fire. As the French said before World War I, “the artillery conquers, the infantry occupies.” Instead of massed infantry fire, as in first generation warfare, one substituted

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<sup>36</sup> War, even when the opening move is an event such as 9/11, is still a duel, as Clausewitz said. Or in the more accessible language of former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, “the enemy gets a vote.” That is true when the enemy is the US as well as when it is a collection of insurgents.

<sup>37</sup> See William S. Lind, Keith Nightengale, John F. Schmitt, John W. Sutton, Gary I. Wilson, “Changing the Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Military Review*, 69:10 (1989), 2-11. It is also printed in *Marine Corps Gazette* (Oct. 1989), 22-6, and is available at: [http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/4th\\_gen\\_war\\_gazette.htm](http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/4th_gen_war_gazette.htm) (10/07/2008). Hammes’ first version was also published in the *Marine Corps Gazette*. “The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 78:4 (1994), 35-44. It is available at: <http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/hammes.htm> (16/03/2004). Hammes expanded his account in *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Zenith, 2004) and in “Insurgency: Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation,” *Strategic Forum* 214 (Jan. 2005). The concept has attracted some interesting critical analysis as well. See, for example: Michael Artelli and Richard F. Deckro, “Fourth Generation Operations: Principles for the ‘Long War,’” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19:2 (2008), 221-37; and the very interesting collection edited by Terry Terriff, Aaron Karp, and Regina Karp, *Global Insurgency and the Future of Armed Conflict: Debating Fourth-Generation Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2008).

massed indirect fire. The chief driver of change from first to second generation warfare was technology, but the goal was still attrition.

With third generation warfare, tactical ideas, not just technology and hardware played a role. The results, war based on maneuver, were achieved initially by the storm troopers of the German army – for which Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (*Storm of Steel*) is the great literary memoir. For the first time armies focused not on direct attack, but on a nonlinear infiltration followed by the bypassing of strong points with the intention of collapsing the enemy force from the rear rather than aiming to “close and destroy” the enemy. This is still taught to Western militaries today. The technological innovation of the tank allowed the Germans to expand their maneuver doctrines from infantry to armour. Hence the *Blitzkrieg*. That is, the shift went from space – or “place” as Liddell-Hart said – to time and speed. The fighter-pilot who could most rapidly complete the observation-orientation-decision-action (OODA) – a term introduced by USAF Colonel John Boyd – sequence would kill his opponent.

As noted, in third generation warfare, tactics were nonlinear and they resulted at least as much from new ideas as from new technology. So what, Lind et al. asked, would fourth-generation warfare look like? They suggest four novel attributes. First, the battlespace would be maximally dispersed to include the whole society attacked by small numbers of equally dispersed combatants. Second, there would be decreased reliance on centralized logistics since dispersion would mean “living off the land.” Third, maneuver would be even more important and mass would be much less so, not least of all because it could more easily be targeted. Fourth, the goal would be to collapse the enemy internally, not to destroy him physically, because the dispersed, and very light, agile forces could not destroy an enemy by attacking a defending military head on.

A number of implications followed from this theory. First, the rigid distinction between peace and war evaporated. Combatant action could take place throughout the depth of the society attacked. Swarming tactics rather than even the remnants of linearity as found in the *Blitzkrieg* would likely prove useful. Lind et al. also anticipated all sorts of technological wizardry to serve as force multipliers, as well as new psychological operations and an increased importance for TV. Terrorism is, obviously, the traditional name for such warfare, but Lind *et al.* insisted it would be terrorism with a difference, namely the increasing disorder of the battlespace. Not only would fourth generation warriors be terrorists as measured by traditional criteria, they would embrace the disorder of modern battlespace: no lines and columns, obviously, but no uniforms either, nor salutes, drill, or even rank.

On the one hand, special operations forces are a clear response to fourth generation disorder,<sup>38</sup> but on the other, the law, both international, in the form of the Geneva Conventions and the laws of war, for example, and domestic, the notion that the sovereign state is chiefly a legal structure served by the military is clearly understood to be obsolete. What, for example, is the point of describing “battlefield detainees” as “illegal enemy combatants” when they never intended to follow the first, second, and third generation laws of war? When modern democratic armies are compelled for reasons of institutional conservatism to follow these obsolete rules of the game, however essential they were for previous generations of war, then, the authors conclude, they are voluntarily hindering their own effectiveness. But what would it mean to abandon the law? Barbarism.

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<sup>38</sup> For a popular treatment see Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

There have been plenty of criticisms of the notion of 4GW, most of which focus quite properly on the notion of a “generation.”<sup>39</sup> Notwithstanding the conceptual limitations of 4GW as a term of art, by reminding military theorists of the political purpose of war and the limitations of “transformation” and the “revolution in military affairs” that at the time was considered central to all future warfare, Lind et al. (and Hammes) have done a considerable service. Some of the implications of 4GW are also worth noting because they recur in other accounts of the proper way for modern democracies to fight small wars.

At the core of 4GW, Lind argued, is a moral and political crisis focused on the state, including the democratic state.<sup>40</sup> What counts is less how a war is fought than who fights it and what it is, politically, they are fighting for. In Clausewitzian terms, the centre of gravity, the *Schwerpunkt* of 4GW is moral: the practitioner of 4GW aims to convince neutrals as well as enemies that he is fighting for the morally superior cause.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence, how democratic forces conduct themselves after battle is likely to be more important in 4GW than how they fight. This means, at the very least, following successful military operations: do not destroy the state; do not humiliate the opponent’s army; and do not disband the state army.<sup>42</sup>

Western armies once knew these things about small wars. Max Boot, for example, told how, after the Boxers were put down in 1900 in China, the victorious Westerners faced a problem: “what were they to do with the Empress Dowager, Tz’u-hsi? If they deposed her, who would rule China? To avoid this choice the allies insisted on pretending that they had been fighting to suppress the Boxer ‘rebellion’; they refused to acknowledge the empress’ declaration of war.”<sup>43</sup> This political or “moral” focus extends to tactical details as well. Patrol on foot, Lind advised, not in vehicles. Wear soft covers, not helmets and armour; make eye contact, which means don’t wear sunglasses; learn a bit of the local language; use money and say “We’re here to pay blood money” so as to end the cycle of honour killing. Use a “Mafia model” to execute targets; that is, put out contracts on enemies who then simply disappear with no fingerprints leading to the regular military or special operations forces. Consider whether success comes from de-escalation rather than escalation, even if that means more casualties taken than inflicted.<sup>44</sup>

Many of Lind’s arguments, examples, and suggestions for fighting 4GW are controversial chiefly because they deviate so strongly from conventional military operations. And yet, as we shall see below in section five, they have attained a kind of respectability in the context of counterinsurgency (COIN) theory.

#### **f. Complex Irregular Warfare**

The term “complex irregular warfare” was introduced in 2005 in an article by that name published by the Institute of Strategic Studies in London.<sup>45</sup> This article relied heavily on a

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Michael Evans, “Elegant Irrelevance Revisited” and John Ferris, “Generations of War?” both in Terriff et al., eds., *Global Insurgency*, 67-74; 75-7.

<sup>40</sup> Lind, “The Will doesn’t Triumph,” in Terriff et al., *Global Insurgency*, 101-04.

<sup>41</sup> William S. Lind, “The Sling and the Stone.” Available at: <http://www.lewrockwell.com/lind/lind45.htm> (11/06/2007).

<sup>42</sup> William S. Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation War.” Available at: <http://www.antiwar.com/lind/index.php?articleid=1702> (10/07/2008).

<sup>43</sup> Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace*, 94.

<sup>44</sup> William S. Lind, “More Thoughts from the 4th Generation Seminar.” Available at <http://www.lewrockwell.com/lind/lind6.htm/> (11/06/2007).

<sup>45</sup> Anon., “Complex Irregular Warfare: The Face of Contemporary Conflict,” *The Military Balance* 105:1, (2005), 411-20.



doctrinal report by Lieutenant Colonel Dave Kilcullen written for the Australian Army.<sup>46</sup> *Complex Warfighting* makes the by-now expected distinction between traditional warfare, characterized by “disarming or defeating the enemy’s will through battle,” and assuming “the enemy was a rational actor, who could recognize loss, apply a cost-benefit calculus, and ultimately accept defeat,” and the current “conflict environment,” in which “war has diffused into ‘peacetime’” and participants are not always rational actors in a conventional cost-benefit sense.<sup>47</sup>

As the Institute of Strategic Studies version explained, one of the dimensions of complexity is that the adversaries of regular state military forces include insurgents, terrorists, and criminals so that friendly troops, hostiles, and neutral populations are all part of a single interconnected whole. This is why actions directed simply at hostile forces tend to alienate neutrals and actions taken to win over the population can easily be stymied by loosely connected enemies. This is, according to the author, the major change from the previous and conventional environments that focused on taking and holding terrain or killing enemies. Moreover, because military operations are conducted “among the people,” as British general Rupert Smith put it (and whose argument is discussed in section five), the battlespace or conflict environment amounts to an “institutional smorgasbord”<sup>48</sup> comprised of intelligence services, police, private security contractors, the media, development agencies, the Red Cross, and so on. Not all of these “friendly” organizations are willing to cooperate with the military or to become linked to military command relationships. Perhaps the most important consequence of these newcomers is the effect of globalized media in creating an audience for every action.

Finally there is the “complex” terrain in which regular forces are compelled by their adversaries to operate – a major component of “asymmetry.” This aspect of the conflict environment is the most obvious response to the RMA and transformation of the immediate post-Cold War era, which relied heavily on precision, standoff weapons. The author drew attention to three distinct aspects:

1. Complex physical terrain – cities, jungles, swamps, mountains, crop areas. Typically they combine open and restricted areas and reduce standoff observation and targeting.
2. Complex human terrain – different ethnic, religious, linguistic groups, different clans, tribes, and ideological movements coexist in the same physical terrain. This makes distinguishing the several factions difficult, and it is especially difficult to divide hostiles from neutrals, which exacerbates the problem of collateral damage.
3. Complex information terrain – multiple sources of information exist in a common operating environment, so no military force is able to control information flows.<sup>49</sup>

The result, which comes from the interaction of these three “terrains” is mutually reinforcing and produces a disordered or “disaggregated” environment. Non-state actors are present both in greater numbers than before and many are armed with very lethal weapons; enemies may be

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<sup>46</sup> Kilcullen, *Complex Warfighting* (Sidney: The Australian Army, 2004). Kilcullen later advised American General David Petraeus, one of the authors of the 2006 American Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, discussed below in section five.

<sup>47</sup> *Complex Warfighting*, 9, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Hoffman, “Small Wars Revisited,” 924.

<sup>49</sup> Anon., “Complex Irregular Warfare,” 414.

“protean” in their organization or even leaderless.<sup>50</sup> Combatants and non-combatants are increasingly difficult to distinguish, so that the Institute of Strategic Studies proposed substituting the term “mission space” for “battlespace” as a way of describing this cluttered and complex environment. On the other hand, weapons in the hands of hostiles are both lethal and concealable so fighting – battle – is hardly excluded from the mission space. On the contrary, what this aspect of complexity means is that regular forces can encounter highly lethal hostiles without warning in any type of operation. As Hoffman put it, “Cunning savagery and organizational adaptation will be the only constant.”<sup>51</sup>

#### **g. Conclusion**

Two conclusions can be readily drawn from the foregoing survey of the modes and orders of small wars. The first is that the conflict environment of the twenty-first century is markedly different from what was envisaged by late twentieth century theorists of symmetric or conventional war, which emphasized transformation, the issue of the RMA, the role of precision standoff engagement, networked information systems, the system of systems, and the like. Specifically, ground forces have been required to fight at close quarters, which has changed the anticipated role of RMA force multipliers such as night vision goggles or PGMs. In other words the expected effects of the RMA on inter-state conflicts only apply selectively to small wars. Moreover, the actual conflict situations are sufficiently ambiguous that junior commanders are more likely to have better situational awareness than senior ones even with the access the latter have to extensive technological help. A second conclusion is that this same ambiguity and general “mission space” complexity has meant that politics are again central to a military understanding of any particular confrontation or conflict. There are other terms used to describe the subject-matter of this paper – limited wars and intra-state wars being the most obvious – but the material presented above should be an adequate delimitation.

### **4. FIGHTING SMALL WARS BADLY**

#### **a. Introduction**

The title of this section is borrowed from an article by Robert M. Cassidy.<sup>52</sup> The evidence that smaller powers, including non-state actors, are increasingly successful in waging small wars against larger powers, including democracies, is persuasive. According to Arreguín-Toft, between 1800 and 1849 strong actors won nearly 90% of the time; by the time-period 1950-99, they won less than half the time.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Jonathan D. Caverley noted that since 1948,

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<sup>50</sup> Jessica Stern, “The Protean Enemy,” *Foreign Affairs*, 82:3 (July/Aug 2003), 27-40; Chris Dishman, “The Leaderless Nexus: When Crime and Terror Converge,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28:3 (May/June 2005), 237-52.

<sup>51</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, “Complex Irregular Warfare: The Next Revolution in Military Affairs,” *Orbis* 32:3 (2006), 398.

<sup>52</sup> Cassidy, “Why Great Powers Fight Small Wars Badly,” *Military Review* (Sept.-Oct., 2002), 41-53.

<sup>53</sup> Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4. Of course, not all democracies are “strong actors” in Arreguín-Toft’s sense of the term. It is questionable whether Canada has ever fought alone as a strong actor but it has fought as a member of a strong (democratic) coalition. There are additional complexities regarding coalition warfare, but they are not relevant in the present context. In any event, the problems facing democracies fighting small wars would be exacerbated if the democracy was also a weak actor, but that is not our concern.

democracies have done reasonably well fighting conventional wars (the score is 9 to 3) but have been twice as likely to lose as to win against insurgents.<sup>54</sup>

Whatever the validity of any particular statistical series, the trend seems to indicate increased success of insurgencies and other relatively small forces in conflict with relatively large ones. This observation has raised a tributary question: what accounts for this trend? As a preliminary approach to answering the question we might recall Clausewitz's first definition of war: "an act of force [or of violence, *Gewalt*] to compel our enemy to do our will" (*On War*, 75). This initial model, as noted above, he compared to a duel or perhaps a wrestling match in which the purpose is to crush or, more literally, to throw down the other in order to compel him. Irrespective of the complexities introduced by politics, this essential attribute remains: "war is nothing but a duel on a large scale." Accordingly, the element of will remains central. So the questions in this context now becomes: do democracies have the will to fight small wars, which typically are also wars of choice, especially when they turn out to be lengthy and brutal? To refine the question somewhat: what is there about democracies, which for our purposes are also strong actors, that limits their will to fight small wars through to victory? A first general answer has been called interest asymmetry; a second may be termed democratic squeamishness.

### **b. Interest Asymmetry**

Andrew Mack was the first to argue explicitly that because big states or strong actors have less at stake in small wars than their adversaries, they are less likely to fight as hard.<sup>55</sup> The historical context for Mack's argument was provided by the postwar "decolonization" wars, including the Vietnam War, although Vietnam was never an American colony. Nineteenth-century imperialist expansion by means of small wars, Mack said, was successful. After World War II the imperial powers were in retreat so that, in this respect, we can consider 1945 to be something of a watershed. For insurgents, the first consideration for avoiding defeat is to refuse to confront the adversary on his terms. This allows small countries to avoid defeat and prevents big ones from winning. This in turn, hands the insurgents a political victory, which nevertheless may be accompanied by a military defeat. As Henry Kissinger famously remarked, "the guerilla wins if he does not lose."<sup>56</sup> The *locus classicus* during the Vietnam War that combined political victory for the insurgents and their military defeat was the Tet offensive of 1968.

Mack was well aware of the political dimension to anticolonial insurgencies. The strategic error typically made by the (large) external power, usually but not invariably a democracy, "is a prevalent military belief that if an opponent's military capability to wage war can be destroyed, his 'will' to continue the struggle is irrelevant since the means to that end are no longer available." The reason for this error is clear: "strategic doctrine tends to mold itself to available technology," so if you have big guns, you use them. But since insurgents lack this technology, they also view strategy differently. Or rather, they reverse it: if the political will of the opponent is destroyed, then the superior military capability the opponent can employ is irrelevant.<sup>57</sup>

Mack explained the reason for making the error was more than simply using the tools at hand. Rather, for the insurgents, the war is total and thus the commitment of their will is enormous. For the external power, in contrast, it is limited. Thus, "full mobilization of the total military

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<sup>54</sup> Caverley, "Why Democracies Will Fight More Small Wars...Poorly." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, 31 August, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics*, 27:2 (1975), 175-200.

<sup>56</sup> Kissinger, "The Vietnam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs* 47 (Jan. 1969), 214.

<sup>57</sup> Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 178-9.

resources of the external power is simply not politically possible.” More to the point, perhaps, full mobilization is not considered necessary, which in turn renders it politically impossible. The basic asymmetry of interest is thus compounded by an asymmetry of will.

In this context, the political purpose for the external power, even if it once was clear, tends to become obscure. The result, which Mack calls “political attrition,” stems not from the (inevitable) mistakes of generals, but from the structure of the conflict. For the democratic external power, the debate is always both over guns and butter and over morality; for the insurgent, as for democratic existential war, neither debate ever arises. In a symmetric total war it is all about guns. Only in asymmetric war is there a debate, and then only in the external democracy. That is, debate, which is a measure of strength in a democracy can be, in a small war, a source of political vulnerability – yet another asymmetry.

Mack was also cognizant of the importance of time. If victory comes quickly, the potential for division in the external democracy is lessened even in asymmetric wars. That makes time a strategic factor for the insurgent. Here Mack relied on the arguments of Mao Zedong. Mao argued that democracies cannot fight wars of attrition either financially or psychologically: “Indeed, the very fact of a multi-party structure makes commitment to a long [small] war so politically suicidal as to be quite impossible.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, as the conflict continues and casualties increase, the political and moral justification for military sacrifice will become increasingly less obvious for civilians and troops alike, especially if, as with America in Vietnam, the troops are conscripts.

For the next quarter-century, discussion of why big, external democracies fight small wars on the home turf of others badly typically began with a reference to Mack’s argument, sometimes to criticize it in part or in whole; we will consider the refinements below. But even with this later critical analysis, it is remarkable how much of Mack’s argument remains valid. In 2007, for example, Patricia L. Sullivan restated much of Mack’s asymmetric interest argument using more up-to-date evidence and statistics.<sup>59</sup>

According to Sullivan, while it is always possible that powerful actors lose to weak ones because they employ the wrong strategy, “extant theories cannot explain why militarily preponderant states regularly make poor strategic choices.” Similarly, while it may be true that “the more the actual costs of victory exceed a state’s prewar expectations, the greater the risk that it will be pushed beyond its cost-tolerance threshold and forced to unilaterally withdraw its forces before it attains its war aims,” that observation does not explain why democracies typically underestimate costs. And likewise, with motivation: “how are policy makers to know if a military campaign is destined to fail because of an ‘asymmetry of motivation’ before the troops are sent?”<sup>60</sup>

Even if these “structural” asymmetries can be successfully managed, there is still the problem of the will of the relatively weak insurgent adversary to consider. Here the problem, according to Sullivan, is one of balancing the destructive capacity of the powerful actor with the cost tolerance of the weak one. Here the will of the weak actor, and thus the extent of his invested interests, is as free, or perhaps is even freer, than that of the strong actor.

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<sup>58</sup> E.L. Kazenbach, “Time, Space, and Will: The Politico-Military Strategy of Mao Tse-Tung,” in T. M. Greene, ed., *The Guerilla and How to Fight Him* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 18.

<sup>59</sup> Sullivan, “War Aims and War Outcomes: Why Powerful States Lose Limited Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 52 (2007), 496-524.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 497, 500.

The actual magnitude of destructive power available to the strong actor, Sullivan argued, varies with his political objective so that “the strong become less likely to prevail against the weak the more that attaining that objective is dependent on target compliance.”<sup>61</sup> That is, when a strong actor, which is not necessarily a democracy, pursues aims that can be gained with brute force, its material resources and war-making capacity are likely to be decisive. But, “there is much greater uncertainty about the amount of force or the length of time required to persuade a target to change its behavior.... As a result, the probability that a strong state will prevail over a weak target declines as the need for target compliance increases.” Why? Because, first of all, as we shall see in detail below, “brute force objectives” often do not seem to be worth the effort either in blood or treasure to the strong, but second, “when strong states pursue war aims that are dependent on target compliance, they are more likely to discover that they do not have the cost tolerance to use force in a manner in which it would need to be applied to attain their political objectives.”<sup>62</sup> That is, it is not the cost tolerance of the weak that is crucial, but the cost tolerance of the strong. This problem is central to the Canadian Forces’ mission in Afghanistan. Apart from the volatility of public opinion or the softness of the media and other associated pundits, which is discussed in the next sub-section, the obvious reason is that the strong appear to have less at stake than the weak. This appearance is enhanced with the expeditionary use of the military.

The example of Somalia, Sullivan said, is an “extreme case” but one “consistent with a pattern in which the United States experienced higher than expected costs and withdrew its troops short of attaining intervention objectives despite the fact that its military capacity was at most only marginally degraded in the conflict.”<sup>63</sup> To make matters even worse, target compliance may become utterly impossible when the targets seek “martyrdom.” Finally, one might observe that Somalia was an “extreme case” for Canada as well, though for somewhat different reasons.<sup>64</sup> The killing of Shidane Arone exemplified the problem of brutality discussed in sub-section (d) below. Moreover, that Arone’s death led to the disbanding of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, rather than simply to the punishment of those responsible for killing him, may be seen as a problem of democratic squeamishness, the next topic to be considered.

### c. Democratic Squeamishness

In Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War*, the funeral oration of Pericles was followed by a description of the plague at Athens and the devastating effect it had on Athenian morale in general and on the Athenians’ support for Pericles’ policies. Pericles reminded the Athenians that the war with the Spartans was also their policy because they voted for it. If it were possible to live always in peace, he said, it would be folly to go to war. But that option is not available: we Athenians must fight to preserve our city. “I stand where I stood before, but you have changed.” What happened was clear to Pericles: the Athenians had supported him when they were “unscathed by misfortune” but now they suffered hardships and so their resolution wavered. Pericles went on to restore the Athenians’ resolution by reminding them of their greatness (Thuc., II:61). That is, democracies even in Thucydides’ day apparently wavered in the face of misfortune.

According to Alexis de Tocqueville, modern democracies have a similar problem. His reasoning is not that they forget about their own greatness but that the internal requirements of democratic governance (including debate, as was indicated above) make the formulation of a coherent,

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<sup>61</sup> Sullivan, 503.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 507, 509.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 519.

<sup>64</sup> See David Bercuson, *Significant Incident: Canada’s Army, the Airborne, and the Murder in Somalia* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996) for details.

systematic, and consistent foreign policy exceedingly difficult. As he pointed out in *Democracy in America* (1835):

...only with difficulty can democracy coordinate the details of a great undertaking, fix on a design, and afterwards follow it with determination through obstacles. It is hardly capable of combining measures in secret and of patiently awaiting their result. Those are the qualities that belong more particularly to one man or to an aristocracy.<sup>65</sup>

That is, democratic manners, including impatience and openness, make foreign policy, and especially the conduct of war, difficult.

The reason for this deficiency in democratic regimes, not surprisingly, is a consequence of the regime itself. In the words of Hans Morgenthau, democratic publics are, generally speaking, overly moralistic, shortsighted, and emotional.<sup>66</sup> At the end of his recent (2007) survey of American military personnel, Robert D. Kaplan quoted Col. Robert Wheeler, a USAF pilot and commander of the Americans' B-2 wing:

Wheeler told me that "decadence" is the essential condition of "a society which believes it has evolved to the point where it will never have to go to war" since, by eliminating war as a possibility, "it has nothing left to fight and sacrifice for, and thus no longer wants to make a difference." In such a situation, historical memory becomes lost, while pleasure and convenience take over as values in and of themselves. While a society should certainly never want to go to war, it should nevertheless feel the need to always be prepared for it; for to believe is to be willing – when necessary – to fight.<sup>67</sup>

Kaplan went on to say that America was far from decadent in that sense, but merely having to deny there is a problem indicated its potential. Democracies today may not be comprised of Nietzschean last men, incapable even of despising themselves, but a persistent concern is that, as Thornton said, "in many ways the West has become too soft."<sup>68</sup>

In addition to what may be termed the reasons of principle just indicated as to why democracies are not naturally bellicose regimes, there are specific and contingent historical, sociological, and anecdotal reasons why democracies today have problems fighting small wars. With a few short-term exceptions, neither Canada nor the United States has had much experience governing foreigners; neither has developed a colonial bureaucracy, distinct and often remote from domestic or "metropolitan" politics, along the lines of the British or the French for example, during the nineteenth century<sup>69</sup> (obviously, neither Britain nor France today retain the colonial aspirations of the nineteenth century). In short, democracies, as Thucydides, Tocqueville, and our contemporaries agree, are impatient and volatile, an attribute no doubt enhanced by the media. For insurgents, time is a weapon, the impatience of democracies is a source of

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<sup>65</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, tr., ed., with an intro. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 219.

<sup>66</sup> Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy: A Critical Examination* (London: Methuen, 1952), 222-3.

<sup>67</sup> Kaplan, *Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts: The American Military in the Air, at Sea, and on the Ground* (New York: Random House, 2007), 388.

<sup>68</sup> Thornton, *Asymmetric Warfare*, 181.

<sup>69</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), ch. 7.

vulnerability.<sup>70</sup> One study concluded that democracies are good at winning short wars, but that if they go on for more than a year and a half the advantage shifts to the non-democracy.<sup>71</sup>

We have already noted the preference of democratic armies, particularly the US, to fight big wars or to fight small ones with big guns because that is what they are good at. According to Eliot Cohen the resistance of the American defence establishment is “the most substantial constraint” to the effective fighting of small wars by democracies.<sup>72</sup> And, on occasion, the behaviour of senior commanders does seem perverse. Following the Vietnam war, for example, the lessons learned regarding the conduct of what was then called low-intensity conflict was deliberately purged from the institutional memory of the US Army. As Bruce Hoffman noted, all the material on counterinsurgency housed at the JFK Special Warfare Centre and School at Fort Bragg, N.C. was destroyed by order of the Pentagon.<sup>73</sup> The attitude that led to the destruction of what to commonsense would seem to be a lot of useful material was exemplified by the notorious remark of a senior general regarding Vietnam: “I’ll be damned if I permit the United States Army, its institutions, its doctrine and its traditions, to be destroyed just to win this lousy war.”<sup>74</sup> As we shall see in section five, such institutional and bureaucratic resistance to innovation is as endemic to the military as to other bureaucratic formations and is not, therefore, simply an American failing.

Beyond the question of a historically non-Clausewitzian military culture, there is the question of the preferences of liberal democratic regimes for the inappropriate responses that their militaries make when fighting small wars. Modern industrial democracies including Canada, generally speaking, are capital intensive organizations in the sense that high capital investment is a substitute for labour as a factor of production. It is entirely consistent, therefore, that they would prefer a capital, or firepower, intensive strategy even when, as with small wars and counterinsurgency, it is badly suited. “This in turn is a function of the natural desire by wealthy democracies to send, in the words of Sam Colt, a bullet instead of a man. The real puzzle is the problem’s venerability.”<sup>75</sup> Why, Caverley asked, has there been no learning despite the opportunities? Why do democracies bother to fight counterinsurgency if all they can fight effectively are peer challengers?

One answer – Caverley’s – is that capital substitution is rational for the median democratic voter because it shifts the burden onto the wealthy and away from him who would otherwise have to supply the labour. This allows the relatively poor member of the demos to be, or to think of himself (or herself) as aggressive, but to avoid the costs. That is, a capital-intensive or firepower-intensive strategy is preferred on rational calculative grounds by democratic publics because it is in their domestic interests. The fact that it may also be ineffective does not appear

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<sup>70</sup> Thornton, *Asymmetric War*, 50; Cohen, “Constraints on America’s Conduct of Small Wars,” 168.

<sup>71</sup> See D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam III, “The Declining Advantage of Democracy: A Combined Model of War Outcomes and Duration,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 42 (1998), 344-366. For additional arguments along these lines see also David A. Lake, “Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War,” *APSR*, 86 (1992), 24-37; Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam III, “Democracy and Battlefield Military Effectiveness,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 42 (1998), 259-77; and Michael C. Desch, *Power and Military Effectiveness: The Fallacy of Democratic Triumphalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>72</sup> Cohen, “Constraints on America’s Conduct of Small Wars,” 165.

<sup>73</sup> Hoffman, *An Agenda for Research on Terrorism and LIC in the 1990s*, RAND Paper No. P7751 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1991), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Brian Jenkins, *The Unchangeable War* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1972), 3.

<sup>75</sup> Caverley, “Why Democracies will Fight More Small Wars...Poorly,” 1.

to trouble the average voter who is assumed to be (as in all public choice accounts of political behaviour) a “rational actor” who, at least in the aggregate, chooses what is in his or her interest.

A final argument to explain why democracies are not very adept at fighting small wars speaks directly to the question of squeamishness. The argument, very simply, is that democracies are particularly vulnerable to defeat at the hands of asymmetric enemies because of internal constraints on the use of force that typically are not present with their enemies. In the formulation of Gil Merom:

My argument is that democracies fail in small wars because they find it extremely difficult to escalate the level of violence and brutality to that which can secure victory. They are restricted by their domestic structure, and in particular by the creed of some of their most articulate citizens and the opportunities their institutional makeup presents such citizens. ... Furthermore, while democracies are inclined to fail in protracted small wars, they are not disposed to fail in other types of wars. In a nutshell, then, the profound answer to the puzzle involves the nature of the domestic structure of democracies and the ways by which it interacts with ground military conflict in insurgency situations.<sup>76</sup>

In other words, Merom argues that democratic squeamishness is less a reflection of the decency of the regime than it is a failure of will: they simply refuse to escalate to a level of brutality necessary to win. Let us, then, examine the issue of brutality.

#### **d. Brutality**

The premise of Merom’s argument is that brutality works as a counterinsurgency strategy. By this logic, if democracies had the will to act brutally they would win more small wars. Likewise, Jeffrey Record argued that it seems “reasonable to conclude that highly motivated and skilled insurgents can be defeated if denied access to external assistance and confronted by a stronger side pursuing a strategy of barbarism against the insurgency’s population base.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, according to Martin van Creveld, there have only been two successful counterinsurgency operations. The first is that of the British Army in Northern Ireland, based on “extreme self-control,” following the lesson learned after thirteen people were killed on “Bloody Sunday,” January 30, 1972. This self-control was made possible by regimental cohesion. The alternative was the destruction of the Syrian town of Hama resulting from a three-week artillery barrage by the Syrian army. No media were permitted to interview the few survivors and no concern for collateral damage was ever expressed. By van Creveld’s account, if the professionalism of the British Army is absent along with the extensive intelligence upon which it relied, then brutality, “Hama rules,” is the only alternative.<sup>78</sup> Even Colin Gray is of the view that brutality can work. Winning hearts and minds, he said, may be a morally superior approach, “but official, or extra-official but officially condoned military and police terror is swifter and can be effective. The

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<sup>76</sup> Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>77</sup> Record, “Why the Strong Lose,” *Parameters* 35:4 (Winter, 2005-06), 24.

<sup>78</sup> van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War: Lessons of Combat, from the Marne to Iraq* (New York: Ballantine, 2006), 229ff; 269. Van Creveld considered the British counterinsurgency in Malaysia to have been a defeat accompanied by “an unequalled feat of braggadocio” that called it a victory (p. 221).



proposition that repression never succeeds is, unfortunately, a myth.”<sup>79</sup> The example he cited was Russian brutality in Chechnya. Perhaps.<sup>80</sup>

All these arguments rule out the possibility that democracies exclude brutality because it is useless and not because they are constrained by democratic or other moral principles. But even this formulation of the issue is misleading. Brutality is not a neutral technique that might be applied or stopped more or less at will. Here it might be useful to recall one of the lessons of Thucydides.

The Athenian debate over the fate of Mitelene early in the war with Sparta and the dramatic reversal of the vote to extinguish the city no less than the actual slaughter of the Melians a few years later indicate quite clearly that democracies in Thucydides’ day were entirely capable of barbarism. But there was a larger lesson to his account of the war that he did not emphasize. Several times he discussed the soundness of Pericles’ policy: hold the empire by control of the sea, abandon the countryside of Attica, and above all do not expand the empire. According to Thucydides, Pericles’ death in 428 was an extreme stroke of malign fortune, as Machiavelli might have said, that deprived the Athenians of the necessary integrity of leadership to keep the Athenian demos from undertaking disastrous adventures. The ambitions of Cleon and his successors made the rational coordination of means and ends in the war impossible much as the plague disrupted the well-laid plans of Pericles by killing him.

This argument of chance and necessity, which recurs in a similar form with Machiavelli, is based on the assumption that strategic rationality is an autonomous element in human existence, independent of the given moral and spiritual order. This assumption, however, is untrue, as Thucydides’ younger contemporary Plato argued at great length. That is, when the controlling order provided by any given morality disintegrates, the selection of political and military ends will be controlled by the irrationality of the passions and fears of individuals who undertake actions that previously would have been considered immoral or imprudent – such as expanding the Athenian empire. The coordination of means to ends that are irrational may, for a time, continue to be coherent or pragmatically effective, but when the goals become impossible, no amount of pragmatic rationality can make them achievable. Thus the attempt to expand the empire by sending an armada to conquer Sicily was bound to fail, and it did. To a careful reader, Thucydides considered the defeat inevitable.

Eric Voegelin summarized the theoretical problem as follows:

When the corrosion of reason has reached a certain degree in depth and has befallen a sufficiently large proportion of the people, effective leadership in terms of reason becomes difficult and perhaps impossible, even if the man at the head under more favorable conditions could exert such leadership; in a further degree of corrosion a man of such qualities will, precisely because he possesses them, find it impossible to reach the position of leadership; and in a final degree the

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<sup>79</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, (London: Phoenix, 2005), 223.

<sup>80</sup> I say “perhaps” because the first Chechen War (1994-96), fought shortly after the disintegration of the USSR, was a disaster for the Russians. The second, however, which began in 1999 and, arguably, was concluded sometime after 2007, was fought much differently. Specifically, it was less a pure military operation than was the earlier conflict, and involved splitting the opposition into jihadists and nationalists, allowing them to fight it out, and then backing the nationalists, which is to say, it was more a political operation with the addition of other means.

society by its corruption may prevent the formation of a man of such qualities even if by nature he should not be lacking in gifts.<sup>81</sup>

This essentially Platonic insight postulates a connection between the moral or spiritual corruption of society and the impossibility of prudent, rational leadership. The possibility of a succession of Periclean leaders was remote in the extreme, and should another Pericles come to be, it is unlikely that he would want to lead a corrupted Athens or, if he did, that the rabble would ever permit him to do so.<sup>82</sup> Thucydides' message is clear: a strategy of barbarism as evidenced by the Melian debate corrodes the ability of a *strategos* to make even a rational calculative decision, as evidenced by the Sicilian disaster.

Thucydides discussed the problem in the context of the historical drama of the Peloponnesian war. Ivan Arreguín-Toft provided a conceptual analysis of the utility (or futility) of barbarism using modern examples to illustrate his theory of asymmetric conflict. Access of insurgents to sanctuaries and democratic squeamishness are important considerations, he argued, but they are not decisive. Nor, it turns out, is his notion of strategic interaction. He meant by that term the preferential choice by strong actors of direct strategies to destroy an adversary's capability to fight, which is often ineffective against an insurgent's indirect strategy of aiming to destroy an adversary's will to fight – a problem we have already encountered.

The political costs of employing a strategy of barbarism, which Arreguín-Toft defined as “the deliberate or systematic harm of noncombatants...in pursuit of a military or political objective,”<sup>83</sup> are lower for an authoritarian regime than for a democracy, because the question of squeamishness is less important; however, there is another problem that applies equally to democratic and to authoritarian regimes: once cost-effectiveness, which involves competing domestic interests, becomes a criterion for the selection of a strategy, the contest of wills is over and the war is effectively lost.<sup>84</sup> Barbarism as a strategy turns out to make matters worse, even for an authoritarian regime, not just because of the self-defeating nature of cost-effectiveness, but because, as is indicated below, it makes the rational purpose of war, namely, a peace that achieves the victor's political objectives, more difficult to achieve.

Arreguín-Toft took as his first example the Murid War (1830-59) in the Caucasus: “Again and again, Russia's COIN [counterinsurgency] strategy – kill everyone and destroy everything – backfired.” Whatever military advantage the Russians gained was negated by the corresponding political cost: “Ultimately, barbarism made it impossible to coerce the Caucasian tribes; and if they couldn't be coerced, they could only be destroyed; and that only at a tremendous cost in lives and treasure.”<sup>85</sup> Likewise in the Boer War the British barbarian strategy “lost in post-war political effectiveness anything it might have gained in war-time military

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<sup>81</sup> Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 15, *Order and History*, vol. II, *The World of the Polis*, ed. A. Moulakis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 438.

<sup>82</sup> The problem recurs, for example, in the context of Islamist terrorism where religious ignoramuses such as Sayyid Qutb, Osama bin Laden, or Ayman al-Zawahiri are considered authoritative exponents of the Holy Qur'an. I discussed this problem in *New Political Religions*.

<sup>83</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*, 31. See also Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security*, 26:1 (2006), 93-128.

<sup>84</sup> The reason, at least on Clausewitzian grounds, is obvious: if one side says, “I want to win” and the other side says “I want to win until some unspecified but calculable cost-effectiveness barrier is broken, after which victory isn't worth fighting for” the former will always win.

<sup>85</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*, 58, 63.

effectiveness.”<sup>86</sup> The argument here is that the British went to war initially to end the misrule or bad governance by the Boers but a few years later ended up granting self-rule to the Union of South Africa, not least of all because of Afrikaner nationalism ignited by British brutality.

The record of twentieth-century barbarism is no more encouraging. In Ethiopia, the Italians had “a specific strategy in place for preserving the secrecy of their barbarism,” in this case the use of poison gas to commit mass murder, which depended upon the authoritarian nature of the Italian regime. In addition, the war was over quickly before any international intervention could be mounted – if such a thing were even seriously contemplated in the late 1930s: “Non-intervention by European powers to stop Italian atrocities can best be explained by the context of the day, in which the goal of European stability had come to mean so much to Europe’s leaders that they were willing to sacrifice every principle of morality and justice on its altar.”<sup>87</sup> Eventually, however, even the goal of European stability could not be maintained by appeasement, and the result was a general war. No barbaric regime can count on non-barbaric ones to follow a policy of appeasement, particularly if a non-barbaric democracy recalls that appeasement was ineffective in avoiding an even greater conflict than timely opposition based on democracies recollecting their own principles of morality and justice.

There is a similar lesson to be drawn from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviets, Arreguín-Toft said, “were pursuing the very textbook definition of a barbarism strategy” and, in the Panjsher valley for example, “had a devastating effect.” The only question was: were the Panjsher operations a deliberate strategy of barbarism or “a particularly blunt direct attack strategy which resulted in high collateral damage?” Arreguín-Toft considered the Soviet Afghan campaign to be deliberate barbarism, and cited such measures as the use of chemical agents and anti-personnel mines, including the PFM-1 targeted at children and referred to by Western analysts as the “butterfly mine.” In addition, “Soviet troops rarely if ever took prisoners.”<sup>88</sup>

If proponents of the democratic squeamishness arguments are to be believed, barbarism should have been an effective counterinsurgency strategy for the Soviets in Afghanistan because there were relatively few intrastate domestic political costs. The non-participation of Western countries in the Moscow Olympics was a relatively minor slight to the Soviet leadership and was hardly cost-free in terms of Western domestic politics. Far more important were foreign logistical and intelligence support and the existence of Iranian and Pakistani sanctuaries that reduced the effectiveness of barbarism. As the counterinsurgency campaign continued, the Soviets were faced with three choices: leave; continue what they had been doing, perhaps with more troops as General William Westmoreland had counseled in Vietnam; or switch to a strategy of increased barbarism. The third choice hurt the mujahedeen and made refugees of about half the population. The mujahedeen then were faced with a choice: give up or rely increasingly on external support, external logistics, and on external sanctuary. They chose the latter, accepted British and American MANPADS and Pakistan as a sanctuary. The Soviets left a devastated Afghanistan in 1989; the Taliban replaced the mujahedeen and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1992: “In the end, no one really won the war.”<sup>89</sup> And, of course, the same war is still under way in 2009, at least for the Taliban.

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<sup>86</sup> Arreguín-Toft, 108. Apparently Churchill thought the Boer model might apply to occupied Europe and he ordered the Special Operations Executive to emulate the Boer’s guerilla campaign. The even more effective Nazi barbarism in response ensured its failure. See John Keegan, *Winston Churchill: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2002), 66.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 134-5.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 181-3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 197-9.

The lessons Arreguín-Toft learned from this survey were contrary to Merom's argument regarding democratic squeamishness, among others. Democracies may or may not be willing to escalate to barbarism, but even authoritarian regimes that pursue such a strategy do not necessarily win. Despite following a strategy of barbarism Russia lost the Murid War. The USSR followed a strategy of barbarism in Afghanistan and did not win. Indeed, Russian barbarism in Afghanistan was so brutal that the effects – in destroyed or degraded infrastructure, for example – are still felt today. Without discounting the context of the Cold War, American and British logistical assistance, which was unquestionably intervention, was also motivated by principled opposition to barbarism. This factor is present in the continued support of the mission in Afghanistan although obviously the terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda account for its initiation. Arreguín-Toft summarized the major political and Clausewitzian lesson as follows:

...in most wars military victory leads to political victory, and the duration and quality of that political victory bear some meaningful relationship to the means used to overcome a resisting military. If barbarism is employed to achieve military victory, any peace that follows will be fragile and costly at best.<sup>90</sup>

Other analysts drew the same conclusion from the French military victory (and political defeat) that flowed from using a strategy of barbarism in Algeria. As is clear from the historical record as well as from the 1966 film by Gillo Pontecorvo of the same name, the Battle of Algiers was won by the French Army. However, "the barbarous methods used by Massu [the commanding French general] to achieve that victory, including the widespread use of torture, were instrumental in catalyzing opposition to the war."<sup>91</sup> The opposition to the war to which Mack referred was in France, not Algeria.

Lou Di Marco's analysis is more thorough, but accords due weight to a moral dimension. French doctrine, tactics, and procedures, he said, had fundamental flaws that led to defeat and almost resulted in civil war. First was an "incomplete" understanding of counterinsurgency as a strategic problem. They emphasized too strongly the military dimension, believing "that the army and France itself could not survive another military defeat" following the debacles of World War II and Indo-China.<sup>92</sup> This perspective led senior French officers to argue "that the extremely high stakes of strategic success or failure justified moral compromise at the tactical level," and this included torture. They also justified torture on the grounds that counterinsurgency was "completely different" from regular war because of the importance of human intelligence, which, in turn, they believed could be effectively collected by torture.<sup>93</sup>

Di Marco introduced another Clausewitzian element that, as we shall argue in the next section, has increasingly been recognized as central: the center of gravity for both the insurgents and the counterinsurgents is the support of the population. According to Di Marco, "the French did not understand the link between their tactical procedures and the strategic center of gravity." Thus they did not see that torture "deprived the army of its moral authority" so much so that senior French officers were later willing to take up arms against the French government. The conclusion, therefore, was clear: "the Algerian experience validates the conclusion that the fight for the loyalty of the people is the main effort in insurgency warfare." Despite their tactical

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<sup>90</sup> Arreguín-Toft, 213.

<sup>91</sup> Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 180.

<sup>92</sup> Lou Di Marco, "Losing the Moral Compass: Torture and *Guerre Revolutionnaire* in the Algerian War," *Parameters* 36:2 (Summer, 2006), 70-1.

<sup>93</sup> On the (in)effectiveness of torture, see Chris Mackey and Greg Miller, *The Interrogators: Inside the Secret War against al Qaeda* (New York: Little Brown, 2004).

military successes, the French lost the war because those successes “only undercut the French political aim and their own moral foundation and legitimacy.” The lesson is obvious: discussion of harsh interrogation techniques, which can be construed as torture, is not just a legal and technical issue: is it allowed? does it work? It is also a political and strategic issue.<sup>94</sup> To make matters worse for democracies, the asymmetric nature of the fight is often invoked by the insurgents to justify their own barbarism. For reasons indicated below, insurgents can more easily get away with barbarism than can democracies, even if the latter are willing to abandon their own principles.

Finally there is the example of Vietnam and the use of indiscriminate violence with the creation of free-fire zones. Matthew Kochner and his colleagues situated their study in the context of the discussion of Merom and Arreguin-Toft. They tested the hypothesis that barbarism works using data from Vietnam and some highly sophisticated statistical analyses:

We know the location of virtually every payload of munitions dropped over the Republic of Vietnam between 1965 and 1975. Our data shows that bombing and control varied spatially and temporally throughout the war. Some hamlets were bombed scores or even hundreds of times over a few months; others were rarely or never bombed. The combination of scale, variation, and unsurpassed coverage makes Vietnam an ideal case to test the effects of indiscriminate violence, which is to say, barbarism.

Given the analyses discussed above, the conclusion is not surprising: “we find that indiscriminate violence in the form of aerial bombing was wholly counterproductive as a counterinsurgency strategy in Vietnam.” Indeed, using causal analysis, “we find that aerial bombing increased Viet Cong control.” Their conclusion also had a moral dimension.

It is appealing to believe that what we think is right is also instrumentally rational, but this is often not the case. Indiscriminate violence, used as a tool to repress and terrorize citizens, is repugnant to democratic citizens, yet many governments with the power to inflict it believe that it serves their interests; it is vital to assess the validity of this belief. The data left behind by the American military in Vietnam are, as Kochner et al. said, extraordinary: a systematic and carefully collected record of an atrocity. The irony is that the atrocity appears to have been self-defeating, much as Hannah Arendt argued at the time.<sup>95</sup>

## **e. Conclusions**

The ultimate ineffectiveness of barbarism as a strategy, in Arendtian language, is that it aims to substitute violence for power, and this cannot successfully be done. In more commonsensical language, morality matters in war, including counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations.

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<sup>94</sup> Di Marco, “Losing the Moral Compass,” 73-5.

<sup>95</sup> Matthew Adam Kochner, Thomas B. Pepinsky, Stathis N. Kalyras, “Aerial Bombardment, Indiscriminate Violence, and Territorial Control in Unconventional Wars: Evidence from Vietnam.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the APSA, Boston, 28-31 August, 2008. The reference to Arendt is to her *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1969), 56, and to her distinction between power and violence. The difference, very briefly, is that power always relies on numbers but violence can do without them because it relies on implements. Power corresponds to the human ability to act in concert – as did the Viet Cong; violence is instrumental, which means that it must be used with discrimination, guidance, and justification, none of which, properly speaking, was present in the designation of free-fire zones.

According to Di Marco, “the moral component can be strategically decisive.”<sup>96</sup> It follows that the temptation of barbarism including “torture, extrajudicial execution, deportation, and collective punishment cannot eliminate terrorism.” This is true not only because it is “unacceptable to a liberal democracy” as Arreguín-Toft said,<sup>97</sup> but also because a look at the historical record of “counterterrorist barbarism: assassination, torture, and random reprisal” shows that such methods did not work: “These counterterrorist strategies have been doggedly and expertly pursued for more than forty years by the Israelis in Palestine, but they have brought the Israelis no closer to peace.”<sup>98</sup> Nor, of course, has it brought the Palestinians any closer to peace, which in the context of the Middle East may be a more important factor.

If the rational purpose of war is peace, it seems obvious that if you try to push barbarism as a strategy to the extreme, which is to say, in the direction of totalitarian terror, not only will you “ruin soldiers for conventional missions,” but the requirement for “special” troops is itself both logistically and morally costly.<sup>99</sup> Anything less than pushing barbarism to the extreme – such as the use of free-fire zones – “seems to stimulate as much or more resistance as compliance, and strongly damages the legitimacy of the perpetrator in the eyes of barbarism’s surviving victims.”<sup>100</sup> The reason is self-evident: the use of barbarism makes it increasingly rational for individuals to sacrifice themselves for the cause so that barbarism-provoked fear is more likely to produce resistance than compliance.

Given the nature of small wars discussed in section three, and the difficulty democracies have in fighting them, owing to interest asymmetry, squeamishness, and the futility of barbarism, what is to be done? That is the final topic to be covered. We will look at a British and an American answer to this question. Not surprisingly, they contain similar recommendations.

## 5. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

### a. Introduction

On the basis of material presented in the previous two sections, dealing with the nature of small wars and why they tend to be badly fought by democracies, one can draw some obvious preliminary conclusions. Some concern purely external issues, such as the need of insurgents to have outside help and/or sanctuaries and the threat this poses to outside forces that the small war will grow wider in scope and be more difficult to conclude because more parties are involved.<sup>101</sup> Such obvious considerations reinforce the centrality of politics in the conduct of war as well as its purpose – determining the character and the grammar of war, as Clausewitz would say.

For example, Colin Gray has argued that the chief reason the French lost the war in Algeria was not simply because military barbarism alienated elite opinion in France, however important that was as an element of democratic squeamishness, but because “the French had, and could

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<sup>96</sup> Di Marco. “Losing the Moral Compass,” 64, 76. See also Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,” 186.

<sup>97</sup> Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “Tunnel at the End of the Light: A Critique of US Counter-terrorism Grand Strategy,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 15:3 (2002), 560.

<sup>98</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*, 225.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 9; Arreguín-Toft, “The[F]utility of Barbarism: Assessing the Impact of Systematic Harm to Non-combatants in War.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August, 2004. Philadelphia.

<sup>100</sup> Arreguín-Toft, “The[F]utility of Barbarism,” 37.

<sup>101</sup> See Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* (Washington: Potomac, 2007), ch. 2.

promise, no political idea with a potent appeal to the Muslim population.”<sup>102</sup> Likewise, Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer Morrison Taw argue that “when the government is unwilling to make concessions, provide incentives, or acknowledge valid popular grievances, the counterinsurgency/counterterrorism campaign is condemned to eventual failure.”<sup>103</sup> The reason, at least on the surface, seems obvious enough. Since insurgents, generally speaking, mount a challenge to government, the legitimacy of the government against which the insurgent fights is its political centre of gravity. Moreover, since typically insurgents hide in plain sight among civilians, government-civilian relations are doubly important.

Many of these insights were given systematic form in General Sir Rupert Smith’s *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*.<sup>104</sup> In this respect Smith continued a British tradition of insightful reflections on the conduct and conclusion of small wars, and drew together several threads of the argument we have presented.<sup>105</sup> After discussing Smith’s argument, we will consider how, independently, the Americans came to similar conclusions and operationalized them in the second phase of the Iraq war.

### **b. War Among the People**

Smith argues, somewhat along the lines of Lind, Hammes, and the proponents of fourth generation war that today armies are in a “new situation,” a “new paradigm,” or a “new era of conflict,” that he called “war amongst the people.” This approach implied some changes in the relations of the elements of Clausewitz’s “wondrous trinity” (*Utility of Force*, xiii). Specifically, Smith argued that the conceptually clear distinction between the army and the people had become blurred and therewith the previous characteristics of war, which he called industrial war among states, have been replaced by wars among the people. There is no “secluded battlefield” such as Agincourt or Kursk or the Golan, nor are there necessarily armies, “definitely not on all sides” (*Utility of Force*, 4). War among the people, Smith argued, is a refinement of asymmetric warfare. It does not mean that the two sides are necessarily differently matched, though usually they are: “it is the reality in which the people in the streets and houses and fields – all the people, everywhere – are the battlefield” (*Utility of Force*, 6).

The reason why Western states and Russia have failed to find a military solution to a political problem, the perennial Clausewitzian *problématique*, was because they failed to distinguish between deploying force and employing force, that is, employing it usefully, which Smith calls the “utility of force.” The immediate effect of employing force is to kill people and blow things up; whether the death and destruction achieves anything, whether it has “utility,” depends on the targets and on the political purpose of the operation: “It follows that to apply force with utility implies an understanding of the context in which one is acting, a clear definition of the result to be achieved, an identification of the point or target to which the force is being applied – and, as important as all the others, an understanding of the nature of the force being applied.” If one understands by context “political purpose,” this British general has recovered from the crucible of twenty-first century armed conflict, the chief insight of his Prussian predecessor.

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<sup>102</sup> Gray, “Irregular Enemies,” 20-1.

<sup>103</sup> Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer Morrison Taw, *A Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Insurgency* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1992). A RAND Note, N-3505-DOS, 77.

<sup>104</sup> New York: Knopff, 2007. References in the text are given as *Utility of Force* followed by the page number.

<sup>105</sup> See, for example, Julian Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967); Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peacekeeping* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

There are a number of parallels in the arguments of these two men that we will ignore in order to focus on the major change Smith sees in the grammar of war. Like the 4GW theorists, Smith detects a structure or pattern to military history.

Scharnhorst, Smith said, was the first to sense that what was new in the Napoleonic armies was not just their military organization but their political purpose, which in turn influenced their military organization. The difference between heavy inflexibility and rapid movement infused with élan and flexibility was demonstrated definitively at Jena in 1806, a battle that impressed both Clausewitz and Hegel. Perhaps more important, the division between state, army, and people, which was clear to the Prussians in 1806 but less clear even in the Russian campaign of 1812-13, was eroded even further in Europe by the time of the Great War:

So integral was the civilian effort to the war that it was defined as the 'home front' – a clear sign that this was a conflict not just between armies but between nations and their economies. The people of the Clausewitzian trinity had been incorporated formally into the war (*Utility of Force*, 119).

Moreover, according to Smith, the war ended because “the people element of the Clausewitzian trinity effectively bailed out of the war – which is why the [German] government and the military could no longer sustain it, and had to sue for peace.” And as for the Allied “people,” they too had suffered enormously so that “it would take much to draw them into another war” (*Utility of Force*, 127). In short, the elements of the Clausewitzian trinity had shifted, “like an object suspended between three magnets” (*On War*, 89), over the preceding century. In this perspective the end of the Second World War came not, as in 1918, with the alleged collapse of the German home front, but with the annihilation of the government and the army “The whole regime disappeared” (*Utility of Force*, 142).

The change from the First to the Second World War was an extension of the battlespace from the military front to the government and society. “This was not war amongst the people of later times – this was war against the people” because it “removed forever” the sanctity of the noncombatant. During the Cold War the centrality of targeting noncombatants was continued, notwithstanding the military configuration of forces to fight a conventional mass and maneuver war, because both sides knew that this approach made them vulnerable to nuclear weapons of mass destruction, as the Soviets called them. The members of the western alliance reduced force size and increased technology knowing they could cut costs and still destroy mass targets on the other side, chiefly Soviet cities. At the same time, the two superpowers used their conventional industrial armies to fight parallel wars elsewhere, such as Vietnam and later Afghanistan. Fighting these “parallel wars” Smith said, “we see the first signs of the new paradigm, especially in the nature and objectives of the opponents, and in the constant adaptation of the existing means – the industrial military machines – to non-industrial conflicts” (*Utility of Force*, 199).

The Cold War also provided the overarching structure for postcolonial withdrawals from empire. In Malaya the British succeeded in separating the insurgents from the people, partly because of ethnic differences, and then developed the intelligence to hunt them down on British terms. Moreover, as Arreguín-Toft remarked, the British people were sufficiently patient following the ordeal of World War II to endure the Malaya conflict. With the “loss” of India in 1947, they knew that the independence or “loss” of Malaya would not entail a major blow to their economic prosperity and, indeed, the attractiveness of political independence to all Malaysians helped



undermine the appeal of the (mostly Chinese) insurgents.<sup>106</sup> True, the British withdrew from Malaya, but this was in keeping with their political objectives. In the context of the Cold War, the chief political objective was to ensure that Malaya did not “go communist.”

Similarly the Vietnam War began as an end-of-empire confrontation that became a conflict “and then became embedded in the greater confrontation of the Cold War,” which involved the US, eventually, in the conflict as well. The political confrontation with the US involved the Vietnamese people on both sides of the DMZ “and it was on this count that the U.S. were finally defeated: they never offered the people any alternative.” Despite American military victories, North Vietnamese and Vietcong military force “had greater utility” (*Utility of Force*, 240). By Smith’s account, the Vietnam War brings us directly to “war among the people.” From the perspective of conventional armies, we are dealing with counter-guerilla, counterinsurgency (COIN), stabilization, etc. operations. For simplicity we will call military operations by conventional armies “among the people” COIN operations. Necessarily they are an aspect of small wars.

The objective of such operations is to separate the insurgent from the people. As we noted above, politically (as in the negative example of Algeria and the more positive one of Malaya), this means there must be an attractive governmental alternative to the promises offered by the insurgents. Militarily, it means that force must be used to match, but not massively to overmatch, insurgent forces so as to avoid seeming to attack a small and weak force. As Martin van Creveld observed, when strong conventional armies greatly overmatch relatively weak insurgents it looks unjust and unfair – like a parent not simply smacking a disobedient child, but beating her to a pulp.<sup>107</sup> But, as noted above, the necessity of strong, and especially democratic powers, to refrain from barbarism does not apply to the relatively weak insurgents. Like a disobedient child, they can wreak havoc.

Smith’s rehearsal of recent military history was not intended as a display of his erudition so much as to illustrate an earlier point: “one of the endemic problems of our modern conflicts is the lack of political will to employ force rather than deploy forces – meaning will is close to zero – which is why many military interventions fail: the force capability is voided” (*Utility of Force*, 245). War remains a duel or trial of strength, but the political objectives of using force in the conduct of war among the people have changed. In conventional or as Smith said, “industrial,” war the objective is to win the trial of strength and thus break the enemy’s will; in war among the people the objective is to capture the will of the people and thereby win the trial of strength, a point that has been made above in section three. Because the overall political objective of using force remains to win the clash of wills, “every trial of strength must be won in such a way that each success complements and supports the measures to win the clash of wills. Only then will the forces we send have utility and deliver the political result desired” (*Utility of Force*, 280).

As have many other analysts of counterinsurgency, Smith emphasized the importance of intelligence, particularly human intelligence, and again and again de-emphasized the significance of military might. “Information, not firepower” is the currency that runs war among the people – and the information is neither purely military nor purely political. Moreover, the point of gathering information is not to destroy the enemy but (once again) to separate him from the people; until that happens the enemy cannot be targeted (*Utility of Force*, 377, 384).

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<sup>106</sup> See Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How to Lose a War on Terror,” in Angstrom and Duyvesteyn, *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War*, 154.

<sup>107</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War*, 226.

In fighting war among the people, he said, “no act of force will ever be decisive: winning the trial of strength will not deliver the will of the people, and at base that is the only true aim of any use of force in our modern conflicts” (*Utility of Force*, 334). Using too much force has the undesirable consequence of hardening the resolve of the opponent and, as was pointed out in section four, targeting things of high-value to the opponent, such as mosques, is also counterproductive because of its brutality. The reason is obvious: if the strategic objective is the will of the people the direct application of military force is apt to be useless because “by its nature it is lethal, massive and tends to be arbitrary. Its practitioners have in the main been trained for a war they are not fighting” (*Utility of Force*, 388).

This does not mean that force is ineffective. On the contrary. Force can be effective. But in order for that to happen,

The desired outcome of its use must be understood in such detail that the context is defined as well as the point of application. For the general purpose of all interventions is clear: we seek to establish in the minds of the people and their leaders that the ever-present option of conflict is not the preferable course of action when in confrontation over some matter or other (*Utility of Force*, 409).

For Smith, that is, we are living in a world of confrontations and conflicts, not one of war and peace. Thus, even after a large and successful military operation, the confrontation may well remain. In such a world political and military events and objectives are not only strategically intertwined but, given the nature of war among the people, are tactically intertwined as well. In short, one must seek to win the fights in order to win the confrontation. This is the lesson the American forces eventually learned in Iraq.

### **c. Learning in Iraq**

John Nagl, a retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel, wrote one of the most interesting studies on COIN: *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*.<sup>108</sup> His title was taken from a remark by T.E. Lawrence, in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, one of the few books written from the perspective of an insurgent: “making war upon rebellion was messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife.” As a major, Nagl served as operations officer of Task Force 1/34 Armor, part of the First Infantry Division, in 2003 in Camp Manhattan in the midst of the Sunni Triangle west of Baghdad.<sup>109</sup>

It is clear that in 2003 both Nagl and the organization in which he served still had much to learn about counterinsurgency operations. By and large, army operations in Iraq were focused on “behaviour modification” and the chief method to secure it was to undertake relatively large cordon-and-search raids. It was also pretty clear that these operations were not particularly effective, that there was little utility to the force applied in that fashion, as Rupert Smith might have said.

The military and political performance of the Americans during the early years in Iraq was summarized by the cruel but accurate title of Thomas Ricks’ first book on the war, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*.<sup>110</sup> But, as the distinguished British military historian,

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<sup>108</sup> Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

<sup>109</sup> See Peter Maass, “The Counterinsurgent,” *New York Times Magazine*, 11 Jan. 2004.

<sup>110</sup> New York: Penguin, 2006. Other studies (and especially titles) of what might be called the first phase of the Iraq war were equally depressing. See, for example, Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Daniel L. Byman and

Michael Howard, once said, “all armies get it wrong in the beginning so the interesting question is: who adapts fastest?” In this section we will consider how American forces adapted. Whether they adapted fast enough or thoroughly enough is another question, and one we will not consider.

Senior American policy makers, particularly Vice President Dick Cheney and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, notoriously believed the Iraqis would be grateful for their liberation. Expatriate Iraqis would guide the country into the sunny uplands of democracy and capitalism and Iraqi oil revenues would pay for the entire transformation. Postwar stabilization, they believed, would be easier than the militarily facilitated regime change that preceded it. The story of the first three years of the war amounted to a refutation of the Cheney-Wolfowitz view. Moreover, the reason for their misperception of reality, it is also generally agreed, was a refusal of the senior leadership to accept they had effectively no intelligence about Iraq. As a result the planning assumptions of the Pentagon and CENTCOM regarding stabilization were wrong.

To put it another way, as Julian Paget said over forty years ago, “every effort must be made to know the Enemy before the insurgency begins.”<sup>111</sup> But of course knowledge of the enemy, intelligence, was just what was missing, particularly after the invasion, because otherwise the insurgency never could have begun. As a result, “by the time the authorities realized the seriousness of the emergent situation it was already too late.”<sup>112</sup> Add to the problem of intelligence blindness, and the factors discussed above in the last section, specifically the post-Cold War strategic transformation of American forces which entailed the substitution of “speed and agility and precision” for mass, as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said, the result was an army well prepared to fight a different kind of war.<sup>113</sup> This series of errors gave the Iraqi resistance sufficient time and space to coalesce into an insurgency.

David Galula, a French Lieutenant Colonel and veteran of the Algerian war, noted that COIN operations can often lead to a vicious circle. Military force turns the people among whom the fighting takes place against the military and in turn the military begins to see the people as the enemy. The result is an increase in mutual distrust and hostility.<sup>114</sup> By the summer of 2003 the vicious circle was entrenched in Iraq.<sup>115</sup> By 2006, the insurgency was centred in Baghdad and worse, sectarian violence among Iraqis, which bordered on civil war, had become more important to them than resisting the Americans. Some analysts were contemplating that Iraq

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Kenneth M. Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2007); Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006); James Fallows, *Blind into Baghdad: America's War in Iraq* (New York: Vintage, 2006); Peter W. Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., “How to Win in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* 84:5 (Sept-Oct., 2005), 87-104.

<sup>111</sup> Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 163-4. See also Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peacekeeping* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 95.

<sup>112</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Santa Monica, RAND Occasional Paper, 2004), 4.

<sup>113</sup> David H. Petraeus, “Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq,” *Military Review*, 86:4 (Nov. Dec. 2005), 9.

<sup>114</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006 [1963]), 218.

<sup>115</sup> Steven Metz, *Learning from Iraq: Counterinsurgency in American Strategy* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007). Available at <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil> (01/01/2009), 29.

would become a failed state. At the very least a stable Iraq, let alone a democratic one, looked more remote than any time since the invasion. Thus in the fall of 2006, the British commander, Sir Richard Dannatt, issued an ominous announcement. British troops, he said, should “get ourselves out sometime soon because our presence exacerbates the security problems.”<sup>116</sup> A few months later another British general, Sir Michael Rose, said the Americans should simply “admit defeat” and go home.<sup>117</sup>

General Dannatt was in effect spelling out the implications of the oft repeated Congressional testimony of the CENTCOM chief, General John Abizaid and the US commander in Iraq, General George Casey. These two generals, along with Secretary Rumsfeld, wished to see the Iraqi security forces accept more responsibility. All three saw the presence of US troops as the problem so the solution was to reduce their numbers, thus reducing the number of targets for insurgents. The alternative interpretation was that neither Abizaid nor Casey had made the correct decision on the kind of war they were fighting, a fundamental Clausewitzian mistake, and as a consequence the utility of force applied in the Iraq theatre was low.

Worse still, counterinsurgency means dealing directly with the politics of the conflict, “but [chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Marine General Peter] Pace considered that to be ‘outside his lane.’ This reinforced the tendency within the administration to focus on troop levels and missions rather than the political questions.”<sup>118</sup> And the political question from 2005 on had been the lack of a political entente between Sunni and Shia. In a “regular” COIN mission the typical task involved supporting the host government. But by 2006 the Government of Iraq (GOI) was a party to sectarian conflict and the Sunnis in particular were convinced the GOI was growing increasingly, not less, sectarian.

In June 2006 there was an opportunity to rethink the strategy when senior White House and Pentagon officials met at Camp David with civilian experts outside the civilian and military bureaucracy. The outsiders present included Eliot Cohen, Michael Vickers, Fred Kagan, and Robert Kaplan. This meeting took place shortly after the Iraqi government had been formed, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, had been killed, and President Bush was about to make a secret trip to Baghdad – so it looked, plausibly, that things were working.<sup>119</sup> But they were not, as the failed large cordon and clear operations, TOGETHER FORWARD, demonstrated during the summer of 2006. Casey’s strategy was a bust – a “retreat in place” is what Ricks called it.<sup>120</sup> All the blaming Casey did of the Iraqi military would not change things.<sup>121</sup>

Retired Army General Jack Keane was apparently the first to explain to President Bush, in December, 2006, the “gap between declared policy and the way military forces were being

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<sup>116</sup> Allen Cowell, “Top General urges Britain to Leave Iraq,” *New York Times* (13 October, 2006), A8.

<sup>117</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 2007.

<sup>118</sup> Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 27.

<sup>119</sup> Bob Woodward said of this meeting that “the President’s mind...was already halfway to Baghdad” so his receptivity to the new perspective on events was impaired. See Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2008), 12.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 13.

<sup>121</sup> Woodward’s interpretation of events in Iraq during 2006 was that Casey’s strategy, which the President had endorsed, was correct and that when Bush sought to change that strategy, because in his opinion it was not working, the President, not General Casey, didn’t “get it.” See *The War Within*, 6-7; 73; 201; 207; 266.

employed.” That is, the “strategy’s ends and means did not match.”<sup>122</sup> Keane had been in touch with Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, who oversaw the daily conduct of the war. Keane’s communication was, obviously, outside the chain-of-command since Keane was retired. He came to the conclusion that Casey’s strategy guaranteed failure. Eliot Cohen, whose book, *Supreme Command*, dealt, among other things, with presidents who changed generals during war, agreed. Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations even told the president who to pick to replace Casey: David Petraeus. The initial meetings with Keane et al., were organized by the American Enterprise Institute earlier that fall. It is surely unusual for a civilian think tank, a retired general, and an active-duty general acting outside the chain-of-command to formulate an alternative strategy. That they considered it to be necessary was also a significant indictment of the rigidity of the military bureaucracy.<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, by proceeding outside the military chain of command and, indeed, keeping the Joint Chiefs unaware of a change in focus from training the Iraqi security forces to population protection, it handed the new force commander, Petraeus, a rare opportunity for strategic surprise.

What has become known as the surge was more than an increase in troop levels. Petraeus and Odierno ensured that the mission changed to reflect the new priorities of the White House – from force protection to protecting Iraqis. Moreover, Petraeus, who had previously been commanding officer at Fort Leavenworth where he oversaw the writing of a new field manual on counterinsurgency, had as thorough an understanding of COIN as anyone. In the spring of 2007 a new war began in Iraq.

The new manual reflected much of the classical literature on small wars, especially the arguments of David Kilcullen, the author of the Australian analysis of complex irregular warfare discussed in section three.<sup>124</sup> Kilcullen had argued that counterinsurgency looks a lot like colonial small wars, with the addition of “entirely new elements arising from the effects of globalization.”<sup>125</sup> Two elements of globalization are especially significant. First, the assumption of classical insurgencies was that “the insurgent had real-world objectives, and a practicable strategy that can be defeated by denying these objectives.”<sup>126</sup> As noted above, this assumption clearly did not apply to pneumopathological advocates of imaginary political religions who expect not to achieve real world objectives but to transform the real world itself.<sup>127</sup> The second element is more commonsensical: “modern communications compress the operational level of war, so that almost any tactical action can have immediate strategic impact,” which makes matters increasingly unpredictable.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 32.

<sup>123</sup> Early in the fall, a special and secret study was undertaken by several of the best educated officers in the U.S. military, the “Council of Colonels,” who would report directly to the Joint Chiefs. At the same time similar revaluations were being conducted at the State Department and the publicly appointed Iraq Study Group was also conducting its deliberations. According to Woodward, the colonels were appalled at the lack of receptivity by the Chiefs, and especially at the Chairman, General Pace. See *The War Within*, 179; 201; 241; 243.

<sup>124</sup> FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency* December 2006. Headquarters. Department of the Army. Issued over the signatures of LGen. David H. Petraeus, USA, and LGen. James F. Amos, USMC.

<sup>125</sup> Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency *Redux*,” *Survival*, 48:4 (2006), 113. Contrast the role of the media during the period of colonial small wars with the globalize media of today. *The Times* was an integral part of the British establishment; the *New York Times* is not.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>127</sup> See Cooper, *New Political Religions*, for an analysis of this problem.

<sup>128</sup> Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency *Redux*,” 116.

This latter factor, for example, which was central to the parable of USMC Commandant Gen. Charles Krulak, about strategic Corporal Hernandez, who made the right decision in a difficult situation, has been eclipsed in reality by Army strategic Private Lynndie England who made the wrong decision in a far-from-difficult situation in Abu Ghraib prison.<sup>129</sup> Both in the parable and in real life, the presence of the international media and the speed and pervasiveness of modern communications – including soldiers’ blogs – can transform incidents of relatively low military significance into major political events.

The new manual was based on two premises, which accurately reflected the two parties to the Clausewitzian duel. The aim of the insurgents is “to exhaust U.S. national will, aiming to win by undermining and outlasting public support.”<sup>130</sup> In other words, insurgents are fully aware that democracies have short attention spans and, so far as the political actor supporting the counterinsurgency is concerned (or more specifically the democracy conducting the small war), limited patience, perseverance, or forbearance is a site of vulnerability. At the same time, “killing insurgents – while necessary, especially with respect to extremists – by itself cannot defeat an insurgency.... Victory is achieved when the populace consents to the government’s legitimacy and stops actively and passively supporting the insurgency.”<sup>131</sup> This observation reaffirms what just about every analysis of insurgency has said, that the centre of gravity of the conflict is the host population, the people among whom the war is fought.

At the centre of the argument developed in the field manual were several “Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency Operations.” They include such things as: force protection can increase insecurity; the greater use of force can be less effective; the greater the COIN success, the less force is necessary, which increases risk; doing nothing can sometimes be the best response; having the host nation do something poorly can be more useful than having our forces do it well; tactics that work well here today may not work elsewhere tomorrow; tactical successes mean nothing; important decisions are not all made by generals.<sup>132</sup> Several of these paradoxes were borrowed from Kilcullen’s “Twenty-eight Articles: Fundamental of Company-Level Counterinsurgency.”<sup>133</sup>

Chapter 7 of the field manual, “Leadership and Ethics for Counterinsurgency,” reflected the lessons emphasized by Arreguín-Toft on the futility of barbarism, to say nothing of the self-inflicted damage of Abu Ghraib: “The Nation’s and the profession’s values are not negotiable. Violations of them are not just mistakes; they are failures in meeting the fundamental standards of the profession of arms.”<sup>134</sup> The field manual emphasized the preferability of minimizing force. More force may reduce short-term risk, but it increases risk to noncombatants, which is counter-productive, a point that has been made several times in the COIN literature.<sup>135</sup> Perhaps most

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<sup>129</sup> See Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January, 1999. Available at: [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic\\_corporal.htm](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm) (12/17/2008).

<sup>130</sup> *Counterinsurgency*, ix.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 26-8.

<sup>133</sup> Available at: [http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/kilcullen\\_28\\_articles.pdf](http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/pdf/kilcullen_28_articles.pdf) (15/12/2008). Lawrence of Arabia compiled only twenty-seven articles for his “commandments” published in 1917. The influence of both Lawrence and Kilcullen is apparent in Petraeus’ own “Multi-National Force – Iraq: Commander’s Counterinsurgency Guidance,” *Military Review* 88:5 (Sept-Oct) 2008, 2-4.

<sup>134</sup> *Counterinsurgency*, 7-1.

<sup>135</sup> See Thornton, *Asymmetric War*, 178; Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, 8-9.

important, the new doctrine recovered the chief Clausewitzian insight: “Insurgency is more than combat between armed groups; it is a political struggle with a high level of violence.”<sup>136</sup>

Having clarified the kind of war being waged and having developed an appropriate strategy, the next and most obvious question is: how did the theory work out in practice?

At the very least the Americans had made a much needed adjustment in the use of force. Whereas in 2006 there were hardly any troops on the streets of Baghdad, a year later they were “out there” following Kilcullen’s article 10. Something else had changed in the mode of deployment. Instead of large-scale cordon-and-search raids, usually accompanied by wheeled or tracked armoured vehicles – commuting to war – troops were posted in the communities they were to protect. There were two basic ways of doing so: establishing a combat outpost (COP), generally a platoon size detachment of U.S. soldiers or Marines; and establishing a joint security station (JSS), a checkpoint or outpost manned jointly by Iraqi and American troops. The logic was clear: if this was war among the people, among the people was where it must be fought. Inevitably, therefore, it meant a de-emphasis of large forward operating bases (FOBs) from which troops would patrol in armoured vehicles. According to Ricks, the Americans stumbled upon the COP mode of conducting operations in October, 2006, in the city of Ramadi.<sup>137</sup>

A few months later, with the change of command, Petraeus encouraged his local commanders to make their preferred option the recruitment of members of local militias and their integration into JSS structures instead of trying to kill them. In Ameriya, a dangerous Baghdad suburb, this risky innovation was tried, again with success. According to Robinson, “the rapid growth of the volunteer movement in and around Baghdad remained largely unreported.”<sup>138</sup> Another opportunity arose in Anbar province, a predominately Sunni area west of Baghdad. There al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) had been making attacks on the traditional tribal leadership: “The sheiks felt disrespected and the population was treated like the enemy for three years, until a joint army-marine force [along with special operations forces] finally turned the province by adopting an entirely different approach.” The “Anbar Awakening” proved to be the culmination of the changes begun in Tall Afar and Ramadi. In this way, “Sunnis were granted a role in their own local security, greater political representation, and a substantial share of national resources.”<sup>139</sup>

The requirement of the new COIN strategy, that troops be among the people, had the obvious risk of exposing them to high levels of violence, at least initially. And the summer of 2007 was, in Petraeus’ words, “excruciating.”<sup>140</sup> But then, by midsummer, “even as US troop deaths increased, Iraqi civilian deaths appeared to be declining, decreasing steadily from January on.” By the late summer of 2007 US casualties were declining as well.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps even more interesting, just as Odierno went outside his chain-of-command to effect change, so too did Petraeus go “behind the back of the Baghdad government to put its enemies on the American payroll.” Initially, recruiting Sunni militiamen was called recruiting “Concerned Local Citizens”

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<sup>136</sup> *Counterinsurgency*, 7-5.

<sup>137</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble*, 57ff. See also Neil Smith and Sean MacFarland, “Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point,” *Military Review* 88:2 (2008), 441-52. In the spring of 2005 Col. H.R. McMaster, author of a scathing criticism of senior leadership during the Vietnam War (originally a PhD dissertation from UNC, Chapel Hill) called *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) undertook a similar program in the town of Tall Afar near the Syrian border. The Ramadi operation was on a much larger scale.

<sup>138</sup> Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 267.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-5.

<sup>140</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble*, 179.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 193, 200.

(CLCs) into local security militias. That they were mostly Sunni was not mentioned. The CLCs later became “Sons of Iraq.” Initially recruiting former enemies was done “without informing the Baghdad government” and then the policy was justified because it worked. The Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, a Shia, did not agree.<sup>142</sup>

Maliki’s opposition may eventually prove to be fatal, but in 2007 and 2008 greater opposition to Petraeus’ application of what was now counterinsurgency doctrine came from within the Department of Defense. Some of the criticism – by Lt. Col. Gian Gentile, for example – was based on genuine differences regarding strategy.<sup>143</sup> The gist of the dispute between Gentile and Petraeus was over whether it was possible to protect Iraqis by patrolling in armour from large FOBs into the backstreets of Baghdad or whether COPs and JSSs were the way to go. According to Ricks, many serving officers “greeted Gentile’s arguments with a mix of bewilderment and anger.” To them there was no comparison: “he was FOB-centric. We are JSS-centric.” The latter approach worked; the former failed.<sup>144</sup>

The more interesting disputes were bureaucratic. We have noted that generals ranked above Lt. Gen. Odierno, namely Generals Casey, Abizaid, and Pace, opposed the initiatives of retired General Keane and the civilian experts. Ricks noted that Odierno’s behaviour “arguably ... amounted to insubordination.”<sup>145</sup> It is likely that his superiors would not have endorsed Ricks’ qualifications. In the spring of 2007 Admiral William “Fox” Fallon replaced General John Abizaid as commander of CENTCOM. He apparently thought of himself as a strategic thinker and exuded naval formality. He did not, however, know much about COIN and even less about Iraq.<sup>146</sup> In any event, he strongly favoured the Casey strategy and, perhaps for that reason, did not think that there was much chance for success of the surge and the shift to COIN.

In August Adm. Fallon sent Rear Admiral James “Sandy” Winnefield to review Petraeus’ strategy. Winnefield knew even less than Fallon. Not only was Fallon’s action in dispatching Winnefield an act of discourtesy, he was interfering in what was, in effect, the orders of his own boss, the Commander in Chief: “Fallon never seemed to grasp that even though Petraeus was technically his subordinate, the general held all the cards.” Nor did he, one of the last active duty Vietnam veterans, understand that a generational shift had occurred in directing the war. Both Odierno and Petraeus had served previous tours in Iraq and “were far less inclined than their predecessors to tolerate peacetime protocol or bureaucratic chickenshit,” which is what they thought Fallon was giving them.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ricks, 202, 204.

<sup>143</sup> See, for example, the dispute between Lt. Col. Gian Gentile and Col. Pete Mansoor. See Gentile, “Our COIN Doctrine removes the Enemy from the Essence of War,” *Armed Forces Journal*. Available at: <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2008/01/3207722> (2/4/2009); Andrew Bacevich, “The Petraeus Doctrine,” *The Atlantic*. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200810/petraeus-doctrine> (9/10/2008). Gentile, “A (Slightly) Better War: A Narrative and its Defects,” *World Affairs* (Summer, 2008). Available at: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/2008-Summer/full-Gentile.html> (2/4/2009). And Mansoor, “Misreading the History of the Iraq War,” *Small Wars Journal* (10 March, 2008). Available at: <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com> (01/10/2009).

<sup>144</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble*, 218.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>146</sup> See Woodward, *The War Within*, 340-8.

<sup>147</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble*, 234-5. For an analysis of the venerable technical term, chickenshit, see Paul Fussell, “Chickenshit: An Anatomy,” in *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 79-95.



Matters did not improve for Petraeus when the Joint Chiefs closed ranks behind Fallon. It was, if not unheard of, at least most unusual, for a successful field commander not to have the support of his superiors, but that is what happened.<sup>148</sup> Petraeus' success during the summer of 2007 and the support of the president determined the outcome on the bureaucratic front. In a remarkable failure of imagination by Fallon and the Chiefs, good news from Iraq was another reason to accelerate the drawdown. In other words, Fallon wanted to change the mission back to the failure achieved by the Casey strategy and at one point sought to relieve Petraeus.<sup>149</sup> Apparently it took a direct order from the White House to stop the new Chairman, Admiral Michael Mullen, from further hindering Petraeus.

So long as Petraeus had the support of the president he could pursue his COIN strategy despite opposition from within the Defense Department. Opposition from the Government of Iraq was a tougher nut to crack. The strategic goal was no longer the impossible dream of a democratic Iraq but of a peaceful one that neither exploded into regional war nor imploded into civil war. This meant dealing with Shia as well as Sunni violence and resetting the metric for improvement to be Iraqi not American casualties. As we have seen, by the summer of 2007, by that measure, the strategy was working. Petraeus achieved this change, as noted above, by recruiting former Sunni militiamen, among other things, to provide local security and, more importantly, actionable intelligence. Better intelligence led to greater utility in the application of force.

Militarily, the surge and the change to COIN strategy was a success but it had not achieved the political goal it was intended to, namely create a breathing space to permit reconciliation among Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds to take place. It is not clear whether very many important Iraqis wanted to reconcile, particularly Maliki, the chief beneficiary of excluding the Sunnis. Worse for him, an absence of violence would bring the real questions dividing Iraqis back to the front burner where he would have to deal with them. On the other hand, turning security over to Iraqi forces who did not take orders from Baghdad may have reduced US and Iraqi casualties, but it also postponed any genuine reconciliation, and thus postponed gaining the political objective.

Petraeus' political goal was "sustainable security" based if not upon sectarian reconciliation, in which the Maliki government seemed to show no interest, then at least sectarian accommodation. Initially Maliki believed the CLCs and then the Sons of Iraq were simply unreconstructed Sunni insurgents who had somehow fooled the Americans. When the Americans began cutting deals with the traditional sheiks in Anbar, for example, Maliki saw them as undercutting his authority. Understandably, Maliki wanted to be the ruler of Iraq in his own right. He thought the best way of achieving his political goal was to make a sectarian appeal to the Shia and to reinforce the authority of Baghdad as distinct from the provinces, especially Sunni provinces such as Anbar. He was not simply a sectarian Shia, however, because he was quite prepared to take on the Sadrist Shiite militia in Basra.<sup>150</sup> For one reason

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<sup>148</sup> Woodward, *The War Within*, 377.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>150</sup> According to Cordesman and Mausner, British forces formally turned control of Basra over to the Iraqis in 2007. "But this transfer was little more than a hollow façade, disguising British failures in southern Iraq." As a result, "by late 2007, the British position in Basra had eroded to the point of hiding in the airport." That is, they had failed, precisely, to learn "the utility of force" advanced by one of their own generals. See Anthony H. Cordesman and Adam Mausner, *Iraqi Force Development, 2008* (Washington Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008). Available at: [www.csis.org/burke/reports](http://www.csis.org/burke/reports) (02/03/2009).

or another, as 2008 wore on, Maliki grew increasingly reluctant to cooperate with the American plans for sectarian accommodation.

One conclusion seems obvious. Even if you arrive at an effective COIN strategy and you are supported by your own home government, if the host government does not cooperate, you can fail. To the Americans, “in retrospect the winter of 2007-8 appears to be a time of missed opportunity, when Iraqi leaders should have made great strides politically but didn’t.”<sup>151</sup> Petraeus and the American Ambassador, Ryan Crocker, had achieved strategic clarity about the goal – sectarian, and therefore political, accommodation among Iraqis. But good COIN strategy in service to achievable goals does not always produce the intended results. Sometimes there is nothing to be done but compromise, manage, and compromise again.

The war in Iraq may not be over – certainly the ethnic and sectarian confrontation is still in existence – but the level of violence has at least become manageable. As a coda to this analysis of applied COIN theory we will consider a Brookings Institution “report to the next president” published in December, 2008.<sup>152</sup>

The result of the surge and the introduction of COIN strategies was to mitigate what the authors called “first-order problems,” namely the danger of state collapse and civil war. This success in turn enabled second-order problems to emerge and third- and fourth-order problems lie ahead. But this is a measure of success, not failure. “It is also worth noting that the need for large American combat formations diminishes as each set of problems is addressed and the next moves to the fore, both because the lesser-order problems tend to be more political and economic in nature (and thus lend themselves less to military approaches) and because they are progressively less likely to produce the kind of catastrophic Iraqi civil war that would truly threaten American vital interests.”<sup>153</sup>

Specifically, ethnic and sectarian conflict was down by 90% in 2008 – not because of ethnic cleansing of mixed areas but because of greater security that stopped it, especially security provided by local forces such as the Sons of Iraq and other JSS-centric operations. The removal of sectarian, chiefly Shia, commanders from the security forces has also helped along with the gradual introduction of personnel from other ethnic and religious groups into more homogeneous, and chiefly Shia, formations.

The displacement of sectarian militias into sectarian political parties may be counted as a success, but it “has created a second-order problem regarding the responsiveness of the Iraqi security forces to a future government.”<sup>154</sup> That is, the success of dealing with the first-order problem of the insurgency has created a large and capable security force the leaders of which may decide to take over after the Americans leave. All of these second-order problems, however, are primarily Iraqi ones – dealing with returning refugees, for example. The solutions to them hinge on whether Maliki and the Shia-led government are willing to get along with the Sunni, particularly the Sons of Iraq. Behind the first- and second-order problems “lie a range of

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<sup>151</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble*, 272.

<sup>152</sup> Stephen Biddle, Michael E. O’Hanlon, Kenneth M. Pollack, “The Evolution of Iraq Strategy,” in Richard N. Haass and Martin C. Indyk, eds., *Restoring the Balance: A Middle East Strategy for the Next President* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2008), 27-58. See also Raymond T. Odierno, “Enable from Overwatch: MNF Iraq,” *Military Review* 88:6 (Nov.-Dec. 2008), 2-3.

<sup>153</sup> Biddle et al., “Evolution,” 30.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

third- and even fourth-order problems such as corruption, organized crime, and Iraq's decrepit infrastructure."<sup>155</sup>

Any one of the second-order problems could expand and rekindle the first-order ones that were dragging Iraq toward failure and civil war. There is, therefore, a danger in an abrupt withdrawal of US forces: it could as easily speed reconciliation as derail it. Accommodation, if not reconciliation, will take time and a long series of small steps for which American carrots – economic assistance, for example – are more likely to be useful than the threat of pulling out. Such an approach requires great patience and forbearance at a time when those commodities are in short supply. "The American people have every right to be tired of this war – indeed, the soldiers, marines, and civilians who are waging it are a lot more tired of it than the general American public." Granted, "nothing in Iraq can ever be guaranteed" but "the remarkable series of positive developments" over the past couple of years "have created new possibilities." "Iraq today is not exactly Sweden, but neither is it Somalia." The country is in a position where it can still avert civil war, avoid the dangers of a regional war, and achieve a stability that endures after the Americans go home.<sup>156</sup> The Americans may not have accomplished a complete success, whatever that might be, but it looks pretty much like a success under the circumstances.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

For political science what makes small wars so interesting is the almost complete interconnection between politics and war. This is one reason why we have made so many references to Clausewitz. The conclusions to be drawn from this study do not aspire to be "lessons learned" that now may be applied, for example, to the Afghanistan or conceivably the Pakistan theatre. This would be presumptuous in the extreme. Nevertheless, there are a number of theoretical insights to be drawn from the literature on small wars, COIN, and the vulnerabilities of democratic governments that both political and military practitioners will sooner or later encounter in the real world where many sparrows fall.

The first and most obvious conclusion is that nowhere is the connection between war and politics more clear than fighting small wars where strategic expertise is simply "the use of the military for political ends."<sup>157</sup> That is, an analyst of small wars no less than practitioners must know what the significance and consequences of military behaviour are for the political purpose of the enterprise. And that includes a proper understanding of the enemy on his own terms. This is both a major interpretive principle of political science and an example of what Arreguín-Toft called strategic interaction.

There are two obvious implications. The first has become a practical dogma: there are no purely military solutions capable of resolving small wars, wars among the people, COIN operations, and so on. But there is no such thing as an entirely political solution either – apart from surrender – because violence is involved and can be countered only by the use of force.<sup>158</sup> The tight interconnection of war and politics in this context does not mean that democracies necessarily abjure wars of choice. Democracies must fight when their vital interests are at stake but those are not the only interests democracies have, and neither are they the only interests

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<sup>155</sup> Biddle et al., 53.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 57, 27, 37.

<sup>157</sup> Gray, "Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?" (March, 2006). Available at: <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil> (10/15/2008).

<sup>158</sup> Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, 10.

that warrant threatening or using force.<sup>159</sup> Nor does it mean that force, even for democracies, is a last resort. Sometimes, as in Afghanistan during the fall of 2001, it is a first resort.

Notwithstanding the close connection between politics and small wars, the two aspects can be distinguished conceptually even though in practice they tend to fuse. The military component to small wars is well described in the literature on the subject as well as from practical successes and failures, Iraq providing examples of both. What is often neglected, however, is the obvious point that small wars and the ability to fight them must be secondary to “detering and responding to major conventional aggression.”<sup>160</sup> We have already argued that small wars are not just scaled-down versions of big wars, a “lesser included case.” One implication to be borne in mind, therefore, is that developing the skills to fight a small war brings with it unavoidable opportunity costs: “every month an Army captain spends in Arabic language training is a month not spent mastering large-scale warfare tactics.”<sup>161</sup>

Without simply reproducing the commandments or articles of theorists and practitioners of small wars from Lawrence to Kilcullen and Petraeus, there are several additional conclusions to be drawn. First, the centre of gravity in small wars is the people. The reason is obvious: insurgents seek to deprive the people of security. The assumption is that all people desire security so the only question to be decided is: who provides it? Whose laws rule? One implication therefore is self-evident. If the objective is to establish the rule of law, then you cannot act outside it for tactical reasons, as in Abu Ghraib or, arguably, Guantanamo.<sup>162</sup> Colin Gray put it: when in doubt, hold your fire – for the again obvious reason that shooting can easily produce collateral damage thus undermining the political purpose of the war.<sup>163</sup>

Second, the Iraq experience of the Americans confirmed an insight of T. E. Lawrence that FOB-centric strategy does not work. The Turks sitting inside Medina were no threat to Lawrence’s irregulars: “We had taken away their power to harm us, and yet wanted to take away their town.... What on earth did we want it for?”<sup>164</sup> We may think that fortified posts are a threat to the enemy but insurgents are more likely to view forts as fixed targets that have to be manned and supplied regularly. This makes it easier, not more difficult, for the insurgents to impose costs by IEDs for example, on the COIN regular forces. Moreover, the people inside these posts, particularly if they were not accompanied by host-country security forces, cannot but have a negative influence on whatever civilians remained within their arc of fire or of observation.<sup>165</sup> And where large bases are seen to be indispensable – KAF comes to mind so far as Canada is concerned – we should also be aware that such institutions create a distinct and separate economy. That is, we should consider the enemy’s perspective on Tim Bits as well as our own.

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<sup>159</sup> Record, *Beating Goliath*, 10.

<sup>160</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, “The Folly of ‘Asymmetric War’,” *The Washington Quarterly* 31:3 (2008), 35. See also Michael R. Melillo, “Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities,” *Parameters* 36 (Autumn, 2006), 22-35.

<sup>161</sup> Mazarr, “The Folly of ‘Asymmetric Warfare’,” 41.

<sup>162</sup> This is why, for example, soldiers who used weapons as “bait” for Iraqis to pick up and then get shot by snipers led to murder charges. See David Smith, “Murder Trial Sniper says US used ‘Bait’ for Suspect,” *The Observer*, 11 Nov. 2007. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/nov/11/usa.iraq/print> (10/07/2008); Josh White and Joshua Partlow, “US Aims to Lure Insurgents with ‘Bait.’ Snipers Describe Classified Program,” *Washington Post* 24 Dec. 2007, A01.

<sup>163</sup> Gray, “Irregular Enemies,” 37.

<sup>164</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York: Doubleday, 1926), 189.

<sup>165</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*, 185.

Third, we need to be aware that the endgame, which is still to come in Iraq and Afghanistan-Pakistan, is bound to be ambiguous. The reason is not simply that political negotiations involve trade-offs and bargains, but because, once an insurgency had been reduced to a military nuisance, the strategic initiative moves to the occupied host countries; they can choose to cooperate or not and in any case have their own political priorities and interests. One of the paradoxes of war among the people, as Smith pointed out, is that the objective is not to take and hold territory, but to leave.<sup>166</sup> This ambiguity puts additional strain on the forbearance of democracies.

Finally, we note the reason barbarism does not work is not because of democratic squeamishness, but because of its effect on target communities. In addition, democracies are ethical communities.<sup>167</sup> This consideration brings us to the other side of the equation: how small wars look to democracies rather than to the militaries that fight them on their behalf.

Democracies, as other regimes, have interests that in part guide their foreign policies. It is certainly true that there are plenty of small wars that take place without engaging the interest or the interests of democracies. Münkler's book, discussed above, is filled with accounts of numerous small wars that have taken place in Africa, for example, to which democracies have responded with little more than words of regret. The assumption that we must intervene in an era of failed states to prevent them from becoming havens for terrorists is largely unexamined and unchallenged. To begin with, terrorists do not need full blown failed states to give them sanctuary. A lot of recruitment of al-Qaeda affiliates is "homegrown" – in Europe for example, or even in Canada. Granted that it is always a consideration of Canadian national interest to support our chief ally, which both makes Canadian non-support of the Iraq invasion questionable and continued support of the Afghanistan mission intelligible, the question remains: is the endless pursuit of stability operations a prudent use of resources or "a strategic error of historic proportions?"<sup>168</sup>

The question is essential to debate over the participation of democracies in small wars because, for the other side which we have been calling the insurgents, as noted above, time is a weapon. The military reason is self-evident: we are good at high intensity conventional war; the materially disadvantaged need to win slowly and incrementally where they enjoy a temporary and local advantage, especially among the people. "To accept the necessity for protraction is to tolerate terms of engagement dictated by the enemy; that is not an attractive fact to explain and defend to a doubting and increasingly impatient news media, public, and opposition party."<sup>169</sup> Such considerations raise an obvious question: why bother? Why fight to protect the population if they are hostile to start with? The desire to make new friends is hardly an intelligible foreign policy objective.

Asking such difficult questions brings into focus one of the more elusive, indeed fugitive, attributes of democracy: patience. We have seen how British patience following the Second World War was sufficient to endure the Malayan COIN operations until they were satisfactorily concluded. The same patience was evident in the conduct of British security forces in Northern Ireland. This latter example is highly significant. Granted there were important British national interests involved in the "troubles," it was also true, according to van Creveld, that the British

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<sup>166</sup> Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 170-1.

<sup>167</sup> This is a factor independent of the futility of barbarism as a strategy no matter what the regime.

<sup>168</sup> Mazarr, "The Folly of 'Asymmetric War'," 49.

<sup>169</sup> Gray, "Irregular Enemies," 27.

Army suffered a thousand dead for every three hundred terrorists killed.<sup>170</sup> That is, the British Army and the UK government were prepared to sacrifice the lives of their soldiers. In small wars where the national interest is less obviously served than in Northern Ireland by the deaths of soldiers in democratic regimes – the Canadian mission in Afghanistan comes to mind – the question of patience and endurance grows more politically important.

In addition to the reasons discussed above why democracies fight small wars badly, there is the problem of cultural confrontation. The endurance of the insurgents is conditioned by the consideration that they must stay whereas the endurance of the democracy is conditioned by the fact that they must merely stay the course, which someday will end. As Colin Gray said, the problem of democratic culture “is more a condition than a challenge to be overcome.”<sup>171</sup>

Nowhere is this “condition” more vulnerable than at the conclusion of small wars. From Clausewitz as well as from common sense, we know the rational purpose of war is peace. Moreover, the stability of that peace, even when conflict is succeeded by confrontation, is that the enemy understands that he has been defeated. We have seen above that most modern conflicts are concluded not by peace treaties but, because the confrontation continues, by various kinds of necessarily ambiguous political processes and engagements.

As noted above, this feature of modern conflict provides another challenge to democratic patience. More important, as Gray said, “the modern law of armed conflict was not written to define and protect the rights of the irregular, and possibly occasional, warrior.”<sup>172</sup> This condition of conducting small wars leads the security forces of democracies to act outside the scope of the laws of war in response to an enemy for whom such laws are simply irrelevant. The example of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, which was eventually made subject to the domestic laws of a democracy was present already in the Japanese internal deportation during World War II and subsequent internment litigation.<sup>173</sup> That is, while it may be true at the outbreak of a small war that even in a democracy *inter armes silent leges*, the silence of the laws does not last forever, not even in the face of arguments based on military necessity. Judicial review of executive action, which reaffirms the culture of democracy, may also have consequences that prolong small wars and thus add to the burden of democratic patience.

We argued above that the legitimacy of the host government was an important measure of how well the small war was going. This is self-evident so far as the military side is concerned: as noted, insurgents generally target a government so that the political side of COIN must be to ensure that the options provided by the host government have greater appeal to the people than do the insurgents. But for the external democracy the host government may be so riddled with second- and third-order problems that it may lack legitimacy in the eyes of the democratic government whose soldiers are dying in support of it. Neither Iraq nor Afghanistan is anything like a democracy, however much they have improved from the previous regimes. The implication, that democracies will have to temper their moralism in order to accept negotiations between host governments and insurgents, may prove a challenge to what might be termed political maturity.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War*, 235.

<sup>171</sup> Gray, “Irregular Enemies,” 7.

<sup>172</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 213.

<sup>173</sup> See the discussion of the Hirabayashi, Korematsu, and Endo cases in William H. Rehnquist, *All the Laws but One: Civil Liberties in Wartime* (New York: Vintage, 1998), ch. 15.

<sup>174</sup> The response in the popular press in Canada and in Parliament when the Prime Minister stated the obvious, that “we’re not going to win this war [in Afghanistan] simply by staying” illustrates the

This final question of democratic political culture was illustrated well in an analogy made by Max Boot:

No one expects a big city police department to win the “war on crime.” The police are considered successful if they reduce disorder, keep the criminal element at bay, and allow decent people a chance to live their lives in peace. In the process a few cops are likely to die, and while this is a tragedy to be mourned, no one suggests that as a result the police should go home and leave gangsters to run the streets.<sup>175</sup>

If the era of small wars is not yet concluded (and who believes it is?), then among democracies “level-headedness and tenacity,” to quote the epigraph for this study, remains an imperative for future success. But level-headedness and tenacity are always in short supply, especially in democracies. No one should be sanguine about our ability to fight small wars well, though there are good reasons to think we can fight them less badly than in the past.

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problem. See the analysis by Lewis MacKenzie, “The Afghan Mission,” *The Globe and Mail*, 5 March 2009, A17.

<sup>175</sup> Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 346.

## APPENDIX: CLAUSEWITZ NEGLECTED AND RECOLLECTED

The successful conclusion to the Cold War was accompanied by considerable speculation on the future of war. According to John Mueller, war had become as outmoded as dueling.<sup>176</sup> No doubt his choice of the term dueling was deliberate. In any event, it recalls Clausewitz's statement in *On War* that "war is nothing but a duel on a large scale....an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will" (*On War*, 75). Mueller's declaration, to say the least, was premature.

Several scholars argued that the specific attributes of Clausewitz's "trinitarian war" could also be consigned to the dustbin of history. Indeed, at one point Martin van Creveld announced "if any part of our intellectual baggage deserves to be thrown overboard, surely it is the Clausewitzian definition of war."<sup>177</sup> Others around the same time wrote of a "coming anarchy" or "neomedievalism," a "clash of civilizations" or completely "new wars" based on "identity politics" rather than states.<sup>178</sup> Such wars, presumably, would be independent of state-centred politics and the state was understood by those who rejected "the Clausewitzian definition of war" as its essential attribute. Bruce Fleming, a professor of English at the United States Naval Academy, proposed that the study of Clausewitz be severed not just from the political institution of the state, but from politics entirely: "To a large degree," he said, *On War* "is a mirror of the person reading it. And the problems intrinsic to Clausewitz are those of all moralists.... I propose that *On War* be taught as poetry, even in the staff colleges."<sup>179</sup> In short, as the twenty-first century began, there was no shortage of opinion on the shape of future armed conflict in general and the relevance of Clausewitz's account in particular.<sup>180</sup>

In light of the equally spirited contemporary defences of Clausewitz, it is tempting to respond simply by citing the article of Colin Gray, "Clausewitz still rules, OK?"<sup>181</sup> As was noted above, Clausewitz did not mean precisely what is meant today by the term small war, though he did treat in passing the problem of guerrilla.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, there has been considerable attention devoted to the impact of Clausewitz's thinking on US military reflections. No doubt much of this material can apply, with suitable qualifications, to Canadian strategic thinking as well. Given that the subject-matter of this paper is democracies and small wars, and given that the United States is Canada's main ally – perhaps sole significant ally captures the relationship better – the

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<sup>176</sup> John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

<sup>177</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 57-8.

<sup>178</sup> See Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Random House, 1996); Philip Cerny, "Neomedievalism, Civil War and New Security Dilemmas," *Civil Wars* 1 (1998), 36-64; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

<sup>179</sup> Bruce Fleming, "Can Reading Clausewitz Save us from Future Mistakes?" *Parameters* 34:1 (Spring 2004), 76.

<sup>180</sup> See also Michael Evans, "From Kadesh to Kandahar: Military Theory and the Future of War," *Naval War College Review* 54 (2003), 131-50.

<sup>181</sup> *Review of International Studies* 25 (1991), 161-82; see also Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, 2nd. ed. (London: Cass, 1996), 257-65; Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, eds., *Clausewitz in the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle: The Political Theory of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>182</sup> See Stuart Kincross, "Clausewitz and Low-Intensity Conflict," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27:1 (2004), 37; Werner Hahlweg, "Clausewitz and Guerrilla Warfare," in Michael Handel, ed., *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy* (London: Cass, 1986), 120-38.



distinction between Clausewitz-and-America and Clausewitz-and-Canada (or, for that matter, Clausewitz-and-Britain) is, for present purposes, secondary.

For example, it has been argued<sup>183</sup> that when Bill Clinton became president in January, 1993, he was convinced that US foreign policy in a post-Cold War environment should be guided by humanitarian concerns rather than the US national interest. Having grown accustomed to an American government that pursued rigorously US national interests as they understood them, the “Clinton alternative” posed an interesting problem for Canadian policy-makers. Canada’s first and, so to speak, permanent concern is to consider its national interests in the context provided by those of its ally. This does not mean constantly agreeing with the United States, as has been explained often enough.<sup>184</sup> But what are Canadians to do when the Americans focus on the whims of the imaginary international community, or place their hopes in “assertive multilateralism,” as Clinton put it? Ignoring the lessons of history, particularly the failure of the League of Nations to impose collective security on the world during the 1930s, does not seem wise. This is a doubly foolish policy when the constituent elements of that so-called community are pursuing their own very explicit interests. This may turn out to be an issue with the Obama administration, or not. But it is something Canadians need to keep in mind.

Because democracies tend to draw a sharp distinction between war and peace (for reasons discussed above), and because such a distinction is contrary to the Clausewitzian understanding that war is part of a continuous bargaining process, democratic military doctrine has historically stressed the importance of overwhelming victory. Hence there is an American way of battle more than, as Russell F. Weigley argued in his classic study, an American way of war. This seems also to be true on a larger historical canvas with the not uncontested argument of Victor Davis Hanson, that there is a “western way of war” based on the premise that war does “what politics cannot.”<sup>185</sup> The result, as General Anthony Zini, USMC, put it, is proficiency at “killing and breaking,” which wins battles, is insufficient because it ignores the end-game.<sup>186</sup>

Western industrial armies are unquestionably adept at battle that involves firepower, mobility, and aggression in search of a decisive event. But as Colin Gray observed, “Americans have demonstrated notable incompetence in translating the efforts and sacrifice of their soldiers into the political reward they merit.”<sup>187</sup> In another publication he argued that if we failed to obtain the political rewards from our successful military efforts, the reason cannot be military: “there are cultural, even structural reasons why this is so.”<sup>188</sup> He then provided a dozen reasons why these “cultural” conditions lead to ineffective policies. We have discussed this question in detail above. In terms of a Clausewitzian understanding of war, democratic ineffectiveness at small

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<sup>183</sup> By Stuart Kincross, *Clausewitz in America: Strategic Thought and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2008), 183ff.

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, David J. Bercuson, et. al., *In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy in an Insecure World* (Calgary: CDFAI, 2005); David Haglund, *Canada and the United States: What Does it Mean to be a Good Neighbour?* (Calgary: CDFAI, 2008).

<sup>185</sup> Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of US Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973). See also Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 22. On Hanson’s general thesis, see John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder: Westview, 2003), 12-25. But also Brian M. Linn, “The American Way of War Revisited,” *The Journal of Military History*, 66 (2002), 501-30.

<sup>186</sup> Quoted in Antulio Echevarria II, “Toward an American Way of War,” March 2004. Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks. Available at: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/> (09/21/2008).

<sup>187</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 110.

<sup>188</sup> Gray, “Irregular Enemies?” 12.

war fighting may be summarized as a failure to appreciate the interconnection of war and peace.

Democracies are hardly alone in neglecting Clausewitz. Probably the first to have done so was his fellow Prussian, Count Helmuth von Moltke, the elder.<sup>189</sup> Moltke's approach ensured that the military remained subordinate to the civilian government, but his almost exclusive focus on tactics as the key to victory in battle inhibited genuine strategic thinking about the political purpose of war. Thus the current distinction between fighting and "post-conflict," or, "conflict resolution," which opens the possibility of declaring (as President George W. Bush did aboard USS Abraham Lincoln on 1 May, 2003) "mission accomplished" with respect to "major combat operations" while ignoring the problem of actually resolving the conflict, is a major strategic error. Post-conflict operations are not part of the aftermath of war; at most they are part of the aftermath of battle.

Looking back to the lessons learned a generation ago from the outcome of the Vietnam War, contemporary strategists have argued that the Americans learned precisely the wrong thing. Or rather, the US Army drew the wrong conclusions; the Marines in I Corps, in the north of the country along the DMZ, recalled the lessons of their own history and developed a Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program and Combined Action Platoons (CAP) tactics that were both successful in dealing with the insurgency and cost fewer casualties than the big "search and destroy" operations favoured by the Army.

According to Max Boot, the North Vietnamese commander, General Vo Nguyen Giap, designed his strategy to break the will of the American Government: "Hanoi had accurately concluded that the war's center of gravity was American public opinion; Washington did not come to the same realization until it was too late."<sup>190</sup> The Powell doctrine, named for former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Colin Powell, was the product of the defeat in Vietnam. Among its many purposes, it also reflected the Army's distaste for small wars. Indeed, it has "come to stand for an all-or-nothing approach to warfare, with the ideal war being one in which the US wins with overwhelming force, suffers few casualties, and leaves immediately."<sup>191</sup> Powell, like Jomini, viewed small wars as "organized assassination" filled with "violent passions that make them spiteful, cruel, terrible."<sup>192</sup> Indeed, Frank G. Hoffman summed up the lessons learned from Vietnam, and embodied in the Powell Doctrine as being Jominian rather than Clausewitzian: the Army was "to fight and win the nation's wars" rather than to advance America's national interest.<sup>193</sup>

A Clausewitzian criticism of generals from Moltke to Powell can be summarized with the observation that the measure for strategic success as noted above is the creation of a regime acceptable, if not favourable, to the battlefield victor. The problem remains as Clausewitz indicated: how to translate combat success into strategic and political outcomes desired by winners of battles. In other words, the Clausewitzian logic of war remains though the grammar

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<sup>189</sup> See Antulio Echevarria II, *After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers before the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), ch. 6.

<sup>190</sup> Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 316.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in John Shy, "Jomini," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 158. See also Colin L. Powell, *My American Journey* (with J.E. Persico), (New York: Random House, 1995), 527.

<sup>193</sup> Hoffman, "Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Nontraditional Wars," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28:6 (Dec. 2005), 921.

has changed. The recollection of that insight informs both the American FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, and the Canadian *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. Arguably it is the reason for the success of American COIN operations in Iraq after 2007.

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