

For Peter Ward

War and the Cultural Turn

Jeremy Black

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War from 1990

For long, the world wars were seen as the definition of modern warfare: large-scale, industrial, total and deadly were key adjectives. The arithmetic of threatened nuclear destruction during the Cold War between the USA-led West and the Soviet-led Communist bloc from 1946 and 1989 appeared to keep this description valid. Indeed, there was sufficient nuclear potential to destroy human life, and the catastrophe of nuclear conflict appeared imminent on a number of occasions including 1962 (the Cuban Missile Crisis) and 1983, when the Soviet Union considered launching an attack. Moreover, it was clear which side had won the world wars, and which lost.

Yet, the experience of conflict for the major powers after 1945 was in practice very different to the idea of total war. Wars for survival were replaced by expeditionary warfare, such as the Americans in Vietnam from the early 1960s to 1973, and the Soviets in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1988. Moreover, conscription ceased – in the USA in the early 1970s; and there was no total mobilization of the resources of society. Indeed, spending on the military as a percentage of total national expenditure fell in most major states, and notably with an increase in the share devoted to social welfare.

At the same time, war was devastating in many parts of the Third World, notably, but not only, because it was linked to famine and disease, as well as to more deliberate policies of attack on civilian society. This warfare was frequently in pursuit of ethnic or social warfare strategies aimed at the reduction, if not extermination, of groups that were judged a threat, most graphically with the massacres in

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Rwanda in 1994, but also, for example, in Congo, Sudan, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. Much of the resulting conflict lacked the regularity sought by the professional forces of the major powers, and this absence served to underline the diversity of the nature of warfare. There was often a pronounced overlap with political struggles for control within states, notably in Africa, the continent where conflict was most insistent from the 1980s.

In turn, when such irregular Third World forces came into conflict with the regular militaries of major states, for example Afghans against Soviet units in the 1980s and against NATO units in the 2000s, there was an asymmetrical warfare that raised major, and continuing, questions about the nature of military capability and the pursuit of effectiveness in war. This situation is not a new one. Across the twentieth century, despite technological prowess, Western military superiority on land was more conditional and less secure than is generally implied. This was especially so in the Middle East, for example in Egypt and Iraq after the First World War, when the Western forces found it difficult to do better than their Ottoman predecessors. Yet, despite the limitations, it was a case of Western troops in Beijing (1900) and Baghdad (1917); and not vice versa.

The serious problems faced by the Americans in stabilizing Iraq, having conquered it in 2003, and by NATO in Afghanistan from the mid 2000s have forced the leading powers to rethink tactics and doctrine, notably leading to a greater emphasis on counter-insurgency. These problems have also raised questions about the ability of military planners to think strategically concerning the nature of domestic support for long-term military commitments. The last indicates a major shift from the situation in 1900. Imperialism no longer enjoys public support, while militarist values are publicly displayed in very few societies. There has been a revolution in attitudes to the military that represents a profound change in the context of conflict.

Considering the early years of the twenty-first century, but with no necessary guidance to the future, it was readily apparent that the central narrative of military history that had been dominant for so long, that focused on 'high-tempo' symmetrical warfare ending in victory and defeat, was inappropriate. Instead, it was clear that, alongside the continued threat of such conflict, it was necessary to devote more attention not only to 'little wars', but also to issues such as counter-insurgency, let alone civil control; with these conflicts often not won or lost but, instead, ending in a stalemate. As a result, the cultural approach had to be formulated in order to focus on such conflicts.

The early development of the USA, a state born in war, provides many points that are valid for today. First, and most significantly, the

birth of a new state arose through violence. In the case of the USA, this was a matter of revolution in which there was a degree of foreign intervention. Much of this has been part of the pattern of conflict in the last sixty years. Two key points are the role of force in internal evolution and the extent of foreign intervention. The former is not quite normative, but is far more so than accounts of national history will often allow. As a result, there is a need for an account of military history in which the internal use of force plays an important role, rather than simply a focus on symmetrical conflict between regular armies, and also a need for a discussion of politics that puts an accent on force rather than ideology.

Political evolution in the shape of changes in state boundaries clearly focuses on force. Just as the American War of Independence (1775-83) began the series of wars of decolonization in the Western Hemisphere, and takes on part of its meaning in that context, so the end of the Cold War in 1989-91 ushered in another stage of the wars of decolonization. In this case, however, the colonial control that was at stake was more complex than that of the Western imperial empires of the mid twentieth century. Instead, there was an attempt to challenge the smaller-scale 'imperial' states that had developed an independent identity from the mid twentieth century, if not earlier. This process could be seen most prominently in the Slovene and Croat challenge to the Serbian imperialism that underlay the state of Yugoslavia. It was also the case with the challenge to Ethiopian rule over Eritrea, which had followed the end of the Italian empire in the Second World War, and, moreover, with opposition in Africa's largest country, Sudan, first from southern, and then from western separatists. Resistance to Israeli power in southern Lebanon and Palestine and, from 2005, to Syrian power in Lebanon, was also relevant as, thanks to the earlier conflicts of 1967-82, each power had established a quasi-imperial presence in part of the Middle East, not that that remark is intended to suggest any equivalence between Syrian autocracy and Israeli rule.

Related to this, the new wars of decolonization entailed challenges to the territorial configuration inherited from the political transformations of 1918-75, including (but not only) the end of the colonial Western empires. In essence, decolonization had not ended imperial boundaries, and these had subsequently been maintained as the frontiers of independent states. This challenge to the existing boundaries was pronounced in the Balkans and the Horn of Africa extending to Sudan, but was also seen elsewhere.

In the far-flung Indonesian archipelago, a state based on the former Dutch East Indies, there were demands, in the 1990s and 2000s, for

independence from both East Timor and Aceh (in Sumatra), demands that were resisted by the military and linked militia groups in a crisis that was symptomatic of the role of force in state control and of the military in politics, for the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Military) continued to play a major role after the end of the Suharto dictatorship. To turn again to culture, the military leadership has a deep contempt for civilian rule and, instead, sees itself as above petty rivalries and self-interest. These beliefs affect its conduct, not least opposition to accommodation with separatist tendencies.¹ In East Timor international pressure proved necessary to lead to an election in which the people voted for independence, a decision secured by Australian intervention under UN auspices; while, in Aceh, a peace agreement in 2005 brought twenty-nine years of conflict that had cost 12,000 lives to a close. Conflict between ethnic and religious groups was also seen, notably in the Moluccas, Borneo and Sulawesi. This conflict was linked to that over land and economic opportunity. Thus, in Sulawesi, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Christians in interior areas and towns such as Tentena fought coastal Muslims, both sides using bows and arrows, spears and home-made guns.

The challenge to existing frontiers was seen not only in separatism, but in the habit of interventionism in other states, as with the dispatch of the forces of Rwanda and Uganda into Congo in the late 1990s, which helped ensure that the war there from 1998 to 2003 became the bloodiest single conflict since the Second World War.

This interventionism reflected also an overlap between international and domestic conflict. The overlap was characteristic of many states in Africa and South Asia. Much of the conflict of the post-1990 period was of this character, but complex issues of definition arise in considering such conflict and, more generally, in assessing both domestic and international struggles. In some cases, they can be seen as an aspect of warfare, in some cases of large-scale feuding, and in some of politics.

A key context, whatever the level of conflict, was provided by the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 destroyed the balancing element seen during the Cold War, because China's growing economic strength did not in the 1990s and early 2000s lead it to seek to balance the USA on the global scale. The situation was different in South Asia, where, for example, America's closer relations with India in the mid 2000s were countered by Chinese links with Pakistan; just, as in the 1970s, Soviet links with India had been countered by Chinese links with Pakistan, including the supply of arms. In the 2000s, growing Chinese interest in resources, in order to fuel and supply its economic growth, also led China into greater com-

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mitments in Africa, and it is possible that a more farflung geopolitics of confrontation with the USA will develop. The growing assertiveness of the Chinese navy is indicative.

Strains in the World

As with the growing New World economies of the late eighteenth century, the global context of confrontation is far from static. In the current world, migration in search of work and other opportunities is a particular source of volatility, not least because it repeatedly crosses what have been cultural divides. The nature and rate of migration creates or accentuates both concerns about social and other changes, and a more general sense of flux that many find disorientating. However, short of the large-scale use of force combined with authoritarian policies, it is difficult to see how many states can resist these migratory pressures.

In many regions, pressure on resources is massively increased by population growth, which is more serious in the absence of equivalent economic growth and also where population issues are made more sensitive by ethnic rivalry. Thus, in Pakistan, there is rivalry between the regions as well as involving *mohajirs* descended from migrants from India. Karachi, the biggest city, had a resurgence of ethnic violence in 2010, with *mohajirs* clashing with Baluchis and Pushtuns in struggles linking criminality, politics, territorial control, and economic disputes. Over 1,100 people were killed in this violence in 2010.

Population growth, which is predicted to take the world's population from close to seven billion today to about nine billion in 2050, continues to be a particularly marked factor across the Third World, and contributes strongly to environmental degradation, not least in the shape of pressures on water supplies and on land use. At the local level, much conflict has resulted, for example between new immigrant settlers who cleared land and created farms, and longer-established peoples who used the land less intensively. This was a factor both in Indonesia, notably in Borneo and Sulawesi, in East Africa, and more generally. The resulting conflict extended to the animal world. In a drought-wracked Australia in late 2006, wild camels attacked settlements in an attempt to gain access to water. In these attacks, air-conditioning units, taps and lavatories were damaged in the search for water.

Aside from environmental pressures, civil order is also under challenge in states threatened by large-scale criminality, especially when

the latter is linked to violent political movements. A good example is Colombia, where the radical guerrilla FARC movement partly funds itself by links to the large-scale drug trade.² Concern about both drugs and radicalism led the USA to provide aid to Colombia – over \$4 billion in 2000–6, much of it to the army, with an annual level in 2006 of \$600 million. As an instance, however, of the problems posed by drug wealth, some army units were, in turn, linked to drug trafficking. There were similar problems elsewhere, for example in Myanmar (Burma). Weapons trafficking is also an issue, notably with concern over nuclear proliferation.

Alongside economic issues came long-standing political and ethnic disputes. For example, in the Horn of Africa, there was a centuries-old rivalry between the Ethiopians, who lived in the mountainous interior, and the Eritreans and Somalis, who lived on the coast. The border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998–2000 led to 40,000 deaths. The struggle between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Ogaden region resulted in a large-scale war in 1976–8 and continues to be a source of tension. Indeed, this issue helped cause Ethiopian intervention in Somalia in 2006.

In the same region, but on a much smaller scale, long-standing tension between the Issas and the minority Afars in what had become French Somaliland and, from 1977, Djibouti, was accentuated when post-independence attempts to form a balanced government failed. Instead, in 1981, Djibouti became a one-party state under the Issa leader, Hassan Gouled Aptidon. In 1991, an Afar rebellion began. Many of the rebels accepted a power-sharing agreement in 1994, and those who held out finally signed a peace treaty in 2000. The Issa government had benefited greatly from the active support of the former colonial power, France, and, in turn, hosted a major French military base. Such bases were a legacy of independence from France that, in contrast, the newly independent USA was able to avoid when British rule ended, just as the Latin American states avoided hosting British naval bases.

In 2006, French aircraft continued a long pattern of French military assistance against rebellions in the Central African Republic, a former colony. Elsewhere in Africa, France had taken a major role in Congo and Chad in the 1980s, and in Ivory Coast in the 2000s. In late 2006, France had 18,000 troops abroad, mostly in Africa, including close to 3,500 in Ivory Coast and 1,200 in Chad, and close to 5,000 in permanent bases in Djibouti, Gabon and Senegal.

France's role in Africa today is different to that in North America in the late eighteenth century when the French played a major role in support of the American War of Independence against Britain, but

the contrast is less marked than the forms may suggest. Indeed, the interaction of internal conflict, great power confrontation, and state evolution remains a crucial one that is worth comparative assessment. As the world's greatest power, the USA is the key dynamic force in the international context for many states. Skill in the use of American power requires an understanding of the manner in which this power interacts with tensions and divisions within these other states. This interaction provides allies and opponents for the USA, but does so in accordance with the alignments of their politics, more generally so than with reference to the purposes and goals of American power. Both the former central narrative about industrial warfare, conventional capability and symmetrical conflict, and the understanding of the current military situation across the world reflect assessments that involved preferences that can be seen as cultural alongside apparently more rational processes of obtaining and assessing information. Thus, both idealism and realism are involved in assessment.

Africa

Africa in the 2000s was indeed the continent where, as in the 1990s, warfare was most common in terms of the greatest number of conflicts and casualties. Moreover, military expenditure rose significantly in Africa. Many of the causes of conflict in Africa remained those of the late twentieth century, including ethnic violence and the chaos associated with 'failed states', a term that, again, was both objective and value-laden. In the latter, for example in Liberia and Sierra Leone, political objectives, beyond the capture of power, were hazy, and 'wars' benefited from the large-scale availability of small arms and were financed primarily by criminal operations and forced extortions. There were no chains of command, nor (often) even uniforms that distinguished 'troops' from each other, or from other fighters, and, politically, these conflicts were an instance of a more widespread process in which warlords moved from being rebels to presidents or vice versa.

Struggles over resources complicated the situation in Africa (and elsewhere), with land and water as traditional issues of dispute being joined by new resources such as government expenditure, jobs and access to raw materials, especially oil. These tensions interacted with the issue of central control over tribal groups and peripheral areas, leading to conflict for example in Sudan. Indeed, the problems there were symptomatic of wider currents in violence. Control of oil helped

drive governmental determination to suppress secessionism in the south, while the government also faced a serious rebellion in the west. Militarily, the Sudanese government benefited from its control over the central point of the capital, Khartoum, from the funds gained from resource exploitation, especially of oil, which enabled it to buy Chinese and Russian arms, and from its use of air power and artillery. The conflict in Sudan spilled over into neighbouring states, especially Chad and the Central African Republic. Chad accused Sudan of backing rebels and, in response, Chad forces crossed the border into Darfur in April 2007 and fought Sudanese troops.

Dating to the 1970s, but breaking out with greater intensity in 2003, and mounted by the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army based in the Darfur region, the rebellion in the west of Sudan was directed against the oppression of non-Arabs by the government. In response, from 2004, the government used its regular forces, including aircraft and infantry moved in trucks, to support an Arab militia, the Janjaweed (much of which rode on horses and camels), in order to slaughter the Fur, Masalit and, in particular, Zaghawa native tribes in Darfur. Alongside large-scale slaughter, especially of men and boys, even very young boys, and the systematic rape and mutilation of women, natives were driven away, their cattle and therefore livelihood seized, the wells poisoned with corpses, and dams, pumps and buildings destroyed. The government was assisted by serious divisions among the opposition in Darfur, not least over negotiations and also over whether the goal was partition or a different Sudan.³ Traditional ethnic and religious hostilities played a major role in Sudan, and helped structure antagonisms. Indeed, the separateness of the south culminated in a massive vote there for independence in a referendum conducted in January 2011.

The means of waging war in Sudan were far from those discussed by commentators, especially in America, who had discerned from the 1990s what they termed a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), one largely defined in terms of modern information-led weapons systems and weapons of precision and lethality. Thus, in Congo, much of the killing was with machetes, and bows and arrows and shotguns were employed, alongside the frequent use of mortars and submachine guns. The conflict also led to cannibalism, as well as to the use of child warriors⁴ seen, for example, in West Africa, Uganda and Nepal, and by the Taliban in Afghanistan, as well as by the Mexican crime syndicates that together deployed a level of force similar to that seen in many Third World conflicts.

Other aspects of African conflict that were distant from conventional Western warfare included the use of traditional charms and

spirit mediums, although removing the term 'conventional' opens up references to parallels in the West, for example in the Balkans in the 1990s. Moreover, as in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, violence was often brutal and symbolic. In the Katanga region of Congo in 2004, insurgents reputedly cut off the genitals of victims and drank their blood. Similar brutality and symbolism were often seen in the conflicts between Mexican crime syndicates and by them against government forces. The use of brutality in the latter case made the symbolic point that the authority and power of the state were as nothing and that the norms on which they rested had collapsed. Over 13,000 people were killed in drug-related violence in Mexico in 2010. Extreme brutality has also been linked to a profound level of spiritual anarchy and anxiety.⁵

More generally and in Africa in particular, rivalries between states interacted with insurrections and other civil conflicts elsewhere. For example, warfare between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which involved large-scale fighting of a conventional type, spilled over into internal conflicts in Somalia. In November 2006, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia called Islamists in Somalia a 'clear and present danger' to Ethiopia, a Christian state, claiming that they were being armed by Eritrea. In turn, the Somali Islamists, the Islamic Courts Union, met at Mogadishu, the Somali capital, and declared that they would defend Somalia against a 'reckless and war-thirsty' Ethiopia. Both Eritrea and Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia.

Local struggles such as this one were interpreted by outside powers in terms of alleged wider alignments, not only regional but also global, such as the struggle between the USA and Muslim fundamentalists. In Somalia in 2006, warlord resistance to the fundamentalist attempt to capture Mogadishu was covertly supported by the USA, although, in the event, the capital fell that June to the Islamic Courts Union and the forces of the latter pressed on to attack the Somali transitional government, which had taken refuge in the town of Baidoa.

In turn, the American government encouraged the Ethiopian invasion that overthrew the Union and captured Mogadishu in the winter of 2006–7. For the USA, this was a welcome opportunity to benefit from regional animosities, and to leave the military work on the ground to local forces, although the Americans did provide some air support, a strong ground-attack capability that Ethiopians lacked. Subsequently, opposition in Somalia to the Ethiopian-backed transitional government of Abdullahi Yusuf continued and became more clearly linked to fundamentalists, notably to the *Shabab* (boys) who sought to overthrow it. The *Shabab* were a continuation of the militias that had supported the Union. Al-Qaeda also played a role. At the

same time, the opposition in Somalia lacked the benefits enjoyed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, notably a largely safe haven in parts of neighbouring Pakistan and the experience gained by several years of relatively constant conflict.

From 2008, the forces of the transitional Somali government were backed by about 8,000 Ugandan and Burundian troops under an African Union 'peacemaking' mission largely financed by the USA. The fighting involved plentiful use of machine-guns, mortars, improvised explosive devices and sniping, with control over the central districts of Mogadishu being the key issue, and much of the fighting waged at close range.

A Clash of Civilizations?

The problem of relating all conflicts to a supposed clash of civilizations, an idea advanced, notably by Samuel Huntington, from the 1990s, initially in terms of Islam and Christianity, was also demonstrated in the far south of Thailand where Muslim separatists are seen as resisting a pro-Western government. There are certainly cultural elements involved in a conflict that has been ongoing since 2004, but other issues are involved. The cultural factors are more complex than allowed by the thesis of a clash of civilization. These factors included the problems of absorbing a largely Malay-speaking Muslim people annexed in 1902 by a Thai-speaking Buddhist state. Moreover, the 'cultural' issues are often made concrete by issues of military brutality, which played a major role in the upsurge of tension in late 2004 in which troops fired on demonstrators, as well as by exploitation of potential conflicts by politicians and drug barons seeking their own local advantages.

Similarly, in Uzbekistan in Central Asia, the authoritarian regime of Islam Karimov claimed that opposition was led by Muslim terrorists, a view that neglected the extent to which the long-standing dictatorship faced opposition for a number of reasons. In 2005, troops fired on a crowd in the Uzbek city of Andijan demonstrating against the poor economic situation. Yet, religion also operated as a real force providing a key lightning rod for tensions. In 2007, Pakistani forces stormed the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque), a centre of opposition by radical Muslim clergy, in the capital Islamabad. In response, attacks on the security forces increased. The issues that led to violence might seem trivial, but the tensions were often serious, as in Kaduna in Nigeria in 2002, where Muslim anger about the planned staging of the

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Miss World competition in the federal capital, Abuja, led to riots in which many were killed.

Internal Disorder and Foreign Intervention

Sectarian-linked disputes were not the only ones that were portrayed in terms of wider concerns, nor, therefore, the sole disputes to be internationalized. More widely, foreign assistance was sought, and, if necessary, hired to help resist insurrections. Thus, between 1993 and 2003, Ange-Felix Patassé, the President of the Central African Republic, survived seven coup attempts, including one in 2002 by General François Bozizé, one-time head of the army, that involved serious street fighting in the capital, Bangui. Patassé turned for support to Libya, which provided backing until 2002, and then to a Congolese rebel group, but, in March 2003, Bozizé, at the head of 1,000 men, overran Bangui. The unpaid army was unwilling to resist. Instability in the Central African Republic reflected the knock-on effects of war elsewhere, for conflict in Congo hit the Central African Republic's trade links down the Congo river.

Coups and the possibility of such action continue to play a major role in military history, underlining the central role of political concerns in a military history that is not restricted to war. In 2000, American and Brazilian pressure on Paraguayan military leaders led them to thwart an attempted coup, and that year the army eventually suppressed an attempted coup on the Pacific island of Fiji. An attempted military coup in Chad failed in 2003. There were also military coups in Fiji and Thailand in 2006, although the Thai army was unable to sustain the political order it sought to create. In Fiji, the coups reflected bitter and persistent ethnic conflict between the native Indian and Fijian population.

In Zimbabwe, in 2008, the military-dominated Joint Operations Command in effect gained control from the weakened President, Robert Mugabe, and orchestrated the use of force in order to maintain him in power against popular pressure and democratic methods. The Zimbabwe army, whose members and former members had gained assets and government posts, was linked to violent gangs in brutalizing opponents. Such violence interacted with economic problems in encouraging large numbers of refugees to flee to neighbouring states such as Botswana, South Africa and Zambia, but the economic competition they posed in a situation of high unemployment, in turn, led to violence against refugees in South Africa. Elsewhere in Africa,

in September 2009, soldiers in Guinea suppressed pro-democracy demonstrators, killing and raping many. The previous December, the army had taken power in a coup. Force was used in the Ivory Coast in 2010–11 by Laurent Gbagbo in an eventually unsuccessful attempt to ignore his defeat in the 2010 election. As with Zimbabwe, this attempt underlined the extent to which the use of the military was just one aspect of the employment of force. Gbagbo also deployed civilian supporters who kidnapped and killed his opponents.⁶ In 2011, power in Egypt was seized by the High Council of the Army in order to preserve stability and ensure the departure of Hosni Mubarak, the unpopular president, both of which secured the army's position. The degree to which the military elsewhere in the Arab world was willing to accept change was highly significant.

The role of the military in politics is usually considered in terms of the Third World, but that may well underplay its importance elsewhere, including the USA and Britain. If the threshold for attention is that of tanks in the street, then there is scant sign of this role, but, nevertheless, it is relevant in three respects. First, and most obviously, the military plays a role in military policy that is often greater than the constitutional situation would allow, and with civilian oversight circumvented. Secondly, an ability to rely on the military is important in giving security to government as well as an ability to implement particular policies. Thirdly, the military may well have greater political influence in specific contexts. As an example, the military has had great influence in Israel in recent decades, not only with former generals playing a major role as politicians, but also with the serving military being important in terms of policy such as attitudes towards settlements in the occupied territories and relations with other states. In some states, it is unclear how far the military is under the control of the government or how far it is in effect autonomous. This question is particularly the case in China, where the military appears far more autonomous than in Japan or India. The identification of some Chinese units with particular regions is also an aspect of the situation.

Power-Projection by the Major States

The interaction between violence within countries and external intervention provides a way to consider not only conflict across the Third World but also specific conflicts in which Western powers have committed troops, for example France in the Ivory Coast. At the same time, this context poses a difficulty for Western intervention, as it indi-

cates the extent to which civil conflict is frequent, if not, in some countries, constant. Moreover, this approach questions the analysis that sees violence largely in terms of resistance to the Western powers. Instead, as in Afghanistan, Iraq (in which the insurgents have particularly disparate goals), and Yemen, it is appropriate to note the high levels of civil violence in many states. Moreover, this violence cannot be readily contained in the terms of Western intervention or by means of the attrition of killing insurgents.

At the same time that problems in Afghanistan and Iraq suggested that Western approaches to understanding (as well as winning) war had important limits, it is also notable that the Iraqi insurgents, like the Taliban in Afghanistan, found that their ideas and practices brought less success than they had anticipated. This failure contributed to the general inability of war-making to achieve the results desired by both sides. In Afghanistan, the problems of creating a stable political solution, and thus of making the results of military intervention durable, were fully demonstrated. The government of Hamid Karzai established as a result of the American intervention in 2001 proved very vulnerable from 2005 to a Taliban resurgence, and this vulnerability led to NATO intervention.

The fighting, however, indicated the potential of insurgent-army forces, especially when backed by a relatively secure foreign base, in this case the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. The Taliban were not short of fighters and also benefited from the extent to which they were able to take the initiative. As far as tactics were concerned, NATO and Afghan government forces were based in settlements whose walls and orchards provided cover for Taliban assassins. Taliban ambushes of road links led to a NATO dependence on helicopters for mobility and logistics, as well as firepower, which was also provided by fixed-wing aircraft, but there was only so much air power and only so much it could achieve, especially, but not only, in bad flying conditions. As a result, the NATO and Afghan government forces frequently seemed reactive and unable to protect potential allies, which increased the political impact of the Taliban.

The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 underlined the problem of gauging military success. The Russians rapidly defeated the Georgian military, ending its forcible attempt to suppress secessionism in South Ossetia, but, at the same time, the invasion revealed serious deficiencies in the Russian military, not least in achieving air superiority and in night fighting, while it was unclear whether the local Russian success merited the costs of lost international support. To that extent, there was a parallel with the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, although the Russian action cost far less and could be more

readily afforded, thanks to the buoyant state of the oil-rich Russian revenues. Each invasion, however, underlined the contrast between the successful operational application of greater power and the more problematic wider strategic context. As far as Georgia was concerned, this context proved to be the reassertion of Russia's idea of its own sphere of influence and power, especially in the divided region of the Caucasus, as well as America's tacit recognition that even its power does not extend militarily to Georgia, and NATO's weakness there.⁷

The significance of the Georgia conflict for the assessment of Russian power and intentions helped encourage different accounts of the conflict. This instance was an aspect of a more widespread process, that of instant military history. For example, after the Iran-Iraq war (1980-8), both governments sought to present the history of the conflict from their own, more positive perspectives, the Iraqi regime providing a revisionist view of the Karbala operations that omitted the setbacks and errors.⁸

In the case of the Americans, the key elements in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 proved not to be the situation in Iraq but rather the regional consequences in terms of greater relative Iranian power (as the Iraqi counterweight was removed); secondly, the terrible fiscal consequences which lessened American strength and increased its dependence on foreign capital inflows, especially from East Asia and from oil-rich states; and, thirdly, the strategic rapprochement of China and Russia which undid the major advantages the USA had gained from the Sino-Soviet rift in 1960. Military commentators were not apt to think in terms of such strategic dimensions, but they underlined the hazards posed by the unexpected consequences of going to war, as well as the extent to which the technological triumphalism of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), or, as it is now discussed, transformation, was totally misplaced.⁹ In part, this triumphalism was related to a more general weakness of military professionalism, one in which there was a failure to focus on strategy and to think strategically,¹⁰ and, in particular, an inability to relate military means and political goals,¹¹ and a tendency to adopt a facile response to the learning of lessons and the corresponding adoption of doctrine.¹² That, in the case of America, this failure was linked to a major extension of the role, impact and cost of the military, with foreign policy frequently dominated by military interests,¹³ was not coincidental.

At the same time, the problems affecting advanced militaries in part also arose from the more conventional form of the dissemination of advanced weaponry. For example, having developed heavily armoured tanks to retain force for their offensive capability, Israel

was affected in 2006 when attacking Hezbollah positions in neighbouring Lebanon by the skilful Hezbollah use of anti-tank missiles. Hezbollah's behaviour was far from the classical guerrilla model seen in Iraq and Afghanistan,¹⁴ which raised major questions about Western military planning and the agenda of transformation. Moreover, from 2010, Israel's capability vis-à-vis Hamas forces in Gaza was affected by the deployment by Hamas of the Russian-made Kornet anti-tank missile, which is capable of piercing 47-inch-thick armour at a range of over three miles. The diffusion of advanced weaponry is such that developments, for example of germ capability, are open not only to leading states, but also to lesser competition, such as from North Korea, from states that consider such weaponry a way of improving their position, as well as to terrorist organizations.¹⁵

Thinking the Future

Consideration of the RMA looks to the future, not least to the extent to which possible developments in military capability, for example of genetic engineering to improve effectiveness, or of weapons systems, such as aircraft capable of 'skipping' along on the atmosphere so that they can fly anywhere in the world in two hours, or improvements in cyber warfare¹⁶ and space weaponry,¹⁷ notably space-to-earth weapons, will provide little guidance to changes in 'tasking', the goals set for the military. These goals may well revolve around international struggles, not least for scarce resources, but it is also likely that conflict within countries will become more prominent as systems of social cohesion and control are placed under greater pressure, not least as a result of population growth and its impact on resource competition.¹⁸

There has been, and probably will be, a significant contrast between warfare and military capability. Some major and second-rank powers either did not engage in war (China, Japan, Brazil), or did so with only a fraction of their forces (India). Warfare involved some poor states, but not all of them. Ethnic division led to serious civil conflict in some countries, such as Sri Lanka, but not in all. Resource issues increased tension but, as yet, competition for water and energy has not led to the large-scale breakdowns that have been anticipated. These points serve as a reminder of the unpredictability of war, an unpredictability that remains a constant factor as governments and militaries seek to plan and train for future contingencies. As far as resources are concerned, food is becoming a more pressing issue than seemed likely to most commentators looking to the future in recent years.

Aspects of the future will be reconsidered in the concluding chapter, but several points need to be rehearsed here. First, writing about the future of war and the military serves more powerful psychological needs in Western culture than writing about the past. Again cultural assumptions and identities come into play, and it is necessary to underline that these points do not relate to some unchanging character of Western culture, but, rather, to the situation at the present. Moreover, there is room for suggesting a contrast between the USA, where interest in the future is strongest, and less confident European societies that are more likely to focus on past and present. In part, this contrast reflects demographics, notably the greater proportion of young people in the USA, but there is also a cultural dimension in terms of the standard American engagement with becoming, rather than with the point of departure. The psychological need to engage with the future rests in part on the belief that it validates the present and more particularly, provides purpose. As a result, the future has to be known and controlled.

For example, it was crucial to Americans that the RMA (or transformation) was an American military revolution and one that appeared able to meet the doctrine, politics and military strategic needs of a range of American opinions, from isolationists to interventionists, whether unilateralists or believers in American-led collective security. Similarly, it was crucial to this belief that culture was as it were understood, rather than being indeterminate, because in being understood it could be controlled.

This process of asserting intellectual control related not only to the tension between order and chaos on the battlefield,¹⁹ but also to the political dimension. The 'clash of civilizations' proved an attractive concept because it appeared to explain the new world after the Cold War. Rebutting Fukuyama, Huntington predicted not the triumph of Western values, but, rather, the rise of 'challenger civilizations', especially China and Islam. Huntington drew on the analysis of Islam by another American scholar, Bernard Lewis, specifically his 1990 article 'The Roots of Muslim Rage'. Huntington argued that, in light of the rise of 'challenger civilizations', the established and rival concept of a global community of nation-states accepting a shared rule of international law and set of assumptions could no longer be the answer to the world's problems and, thus, satisfy demands. A global community had been the aspiration of Wilsonian and Cold War American politics and seemed achieved in the 1990s, but Huntington was less optimistic. Terrorism was to drive this lesson home, and Huntington's book, which had been overshadowed during the triumphant (albeit also somewhat uncertain at the time) globalization of the 1990s, now

appeared horribly prescient after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Indeed, Huntington's book was to be translated into thirty-three languages.

The focus was on relations with Islam, which raises the question of what would have happened had the key event of the period not been the terrorist attacks, or if the attacks had failed. Huntington was generally seen as an exponent of the likelihood of conflict between Christianity and Islam, and was praised or criticized accordingly. To some critics, Huntington, who was in fact a lifelong Democrat as well as a self-declared conservative, was a key neo-conservative who had sketched out the prospectus for the new ideological confrontation of the 2000s as well as for the assertive American policies that followed the 11 September attacks.

These policies can be seen as an aspect of a new American strategic culture. As so often, the emphasis in understanding the use of the term culture can be on the simplification of strategy for rhetorical and related purposes. At the same time, this simplification can be seen as providing a key indication of the spur to policy. Thus, when President George W. Bush, addressing a Joint Session of Congress on 20 September 2001, declared 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists', he was capturing a sense of division and struggle that spoke to the American strategic assumptions stemming from the new situation created by the terrorist attacks. Some of these ideas could be presented as stemming from the prospectus outlined in the neo-conservative 'Project for a New American Century' of 1997, but the attacks generated a new political dynamic. The formulation of the last sentence captures some of the problems with the term strategic culture, as it is unclear, in this case, whether to put the emphasis on the ideas circulating prior to September 2001 or on subsequent policy. The call for a 'war on terror' was one for a universal mission in which geographical limits were regarded as an irrelevance that was to yield to will. As a result, an open-ended commitment, in both time and space, was outlined. The use of the 'war on terror' both to act as a prompt to action, and in order to structure the complexities of world affairs and to help direct alliances, can be seen as constituents of a strategic culture, but, again, capture the ambiguities of that concept.

Conversely, and without suggesting any equivalence, Osama bin Laden and his supporters can also be presented as having had a strategic culture, not least because of their presentation of Islam as a converting and controlling faith, rather than a religion limited to the devotion of the faithful. An historical imagination was important to this account, as al-Qaeda depicted Islam as having been driven back from spaces it should control, notably Israel and southern Spain,

while the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia following the Gulf War of 1990–1 was seen by them as another instance of cultural spatial violation. Al-Qaeda sought to use *jihad* as both a call for action and an organizing concept that could incorporate Islamic activism and disputes across the world, as in January 2009 when bin Laden pressed for *jihad* against Israel over Gaza. Earlier, in 1996 at Kandahar, Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, was declared 'Commander of the Faithful' by a gathering of Islamic scholars and, accordingly, invested himself in Mohammed's Cloak. Alongside the emphasis on religion came a stress on social justice as a means and goal of power, which poses problems for those opposed to Muslim fundamentalists.²⁰ In practice, the role of *jihad* in the Islamic world has varied greatly across time.

American strategic culture also envisaged a global battlefield; as well as presenting, protecting and spreading freedom not only as the goal of war but also as an important means. Thus, the National Security Strategy, announced in September 2002, declared:

The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom. These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society – and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages... We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.

To that end, Bush pressed for democracy, notably the American form of democracy, in the Middle East and China, which was a departure from the *Realpolitik* advanced by Kissinger and other realists, and from the priorities he had initially outlined.²¹ Instead, the assumption was that a change in the values of a society, as well as of the operations of its domestic politics, would alter the country's position in international relations, and therefore the likelihood of war. Thus, the goals of conflict became the end of war, a long-standing aspect of what supporters might see as an ameliorist tendency in international relations, and critics as utopian. Building on the oft-repeated claim that democracies do not declare war on democracies, the call for democratization was an aspect of a strategy seeking to maintain stability and prevent wars, as much as to win them. Opposition to weapons' proliferation was part of the same policy. The strategic counterpart was that deterrence no longer appeared effective, or, at best, seemed of uncertain effectiveness, when confronted by terrorism or states governed by fanatical rulers. Thus, pre-emption appeared necessary as a strategic means and goal.

A different set of cultural assumptions seemed at play when the USA considered China. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review described it as having 'the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages'.²² Reflecting 'realist' geopolitical competition,²³ China indeed aroused strategic concern, not least due to its economic growth and quest for resources, but there was not in the 2000s the sense of outrage or antipathy that much of American public opinion expressed in reaction to its perception of radical Islam. The 2010 controversy over the plan to locate a mosque near the site of the Twin Towers in New York provided another iteration of this response. Given the extent to which strategic priorities reflected domestic political assumptions, the different degrees of almost instinctive hostility aroused by the challenges posed by China and Islam were militarily significant.

Concern about China entailed for America a military focused on symmetrical warfare, and with weaponry and doctrine to match, notably high-tech naval and air power, while the concern about Islam meant a focus on a counter-insurgency capability and the army in particular. The implications of the political culture of threat and anxiety feed directly into military structures, while the latter, in turn, also help mould responses and priorities.

Conclusions

These structures cannot be readily separated from military culture in the shape of the assumptions of the military and expectations about its use. This issue was raised in the *Times* in 2010. On 25 November, the paper published a letter from Admiral Lord West of Spithead, a one-time First Sea Lord. Under the newspaper headline 'Korean crisis and UK strike capability', Lord West argued that Britain should be willing and able to support the USA in the defence of South Korea against attack from the north, which then seemed threatened. Two days later, a critical columnist, Matthew Parris, wrote in the paper 'the retired admiral is not off on some fanciful conceit of his own, but giving voice to an inherited mindset shared by millions of his countrymen, including many capable, brave and distinguished military men. They really do believe that post-imperial Britain can afford and manage a central, guiding role in the international disposition and use of military power'. Instead, Parris argued the realist case of limited British resources, concluding 'The next generation must learn

to accept, as I fear much of my generation never will, that there exist future possibilities for which we cannot afford to cater'.

Parris' point about generational assumptions and impressions is an important one that can be matched in the consideration of other societies, as with discussion of radicalization among some Islamic youth. A focus on generational assumptions gives strength to the cultural interpretation by adding a degree of dynamism to it, but not such a degree as to invalidate the notion of culture. The 'unfixed' nature of cultural factors help explain their significance, as they can cause, reflect and incorporate change, or help to do so.

A similar point can be made about the perceived need to confront the future for technological reasons that make the past seem redundant. Cyber and space warfare seem prime instances of this process. They do indeed encourage an emphasis on the new and unexpected, but arguments relating to these forms of warfare also reflect cultural and psychological norms and notions. A focus on fast-moving change and unique and chaotic circumstances is currently fashionable, but this approach overplays the extent of change.²⁴