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STRATEGY & DEMOCRACY

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On 18 June 2012 a group of academics and think-tank experts from NATO member states, of whom I was one, went to Kabul University to meet a class of politics students. We had imagined that it would be an opportunity to discuss the upcoming presidential election, due in 2014. Hamid Karzai was not eligible to run again, and the proliferation of parties in Afghanistan made it even more important to identify who the principal candidates might be. However, like many Afghans, the students felt there was still plenty of time to sort out the issue. More pressing for them was their security. The schedule for NATO's withdrawal from active combat operations, also due to be completed in 2014, had been set. So, understandably, they wanted to know what NATO was going to do after 2014.

One particularly outraged student referred to President Obama's visit to Kabul just over six weeks previously. On 1 May 2012 Obama had met President Karzai to sign 'the enduring strategic partnership between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America'. The agreement included arrangements for a long-term security relationship, and for the possibility of US forces remaining in Afghanistan after 2014 'for the purposes of training Afghan Forces and targeting the remnants of al-Qaeda'. The deal had been trumpeted on Afghan television by both Obama and Karzai. However, this was not what agitated the student. In the early hours of the following morning, at 4.01 Afghan time, he had again seen President Obama on television, but on this occasion addressing an American audience from the US base at Bagram. He told the United States that 'our troops will be coming home'.

In 2005 in *The Utility of Force* General Sir Rupert Smith characterised today's wars as 'wars among the people'. He was reflecting on his own experiences in Northern Ireland and Bosnia, but what he wrote caught the emerging concerns of American and British soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. They were engaged, as armies in most counter-insurgency campaigns before them had also been, in securing the loyalty of the local people. For Rupert Smith, 'wars among the people' characterised the operating environment in which armies have often, and not only recently, found themselves. That is not the primary focus of this lecture. Instead its concern is with the strategic context. What does 'war among the people' mean in the context of national strategy? My purpose is to address less the loyalties of peoples caught in the cross fires of combat zones, and more the role of peoples in mature democracies in the shaping of the decisions to intervene in fragile states.

These are not separate issues. In May 2012 President Obama gave one message to the people of Afghanistan and another to the people of the United States. Although both statements could be reconciled, outwardly they contradicted each other. He told each community what he thought it wanted to hear, but in the process, he caused confusion and dismay. He was not the only leader of a democratic state to use public statements to send mixed messages. Britain's prime minister, David Cameron, said in 2010 that Britain would end its war in Afghanistan by 2015, and went on to explain that he had set a clear withdrawal date because the British people expected it and were right to do so. He said nothing about the objectives of the United Kingdom government within Afghanistan, or the political consequences of the timing for the Afghan people, or what a desirable outcome might look like for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Both the president of the United States and the prime minister of the United Kingdom were effectively treating their own electorates as partners in their decision-making processes: this was a much more significant development in strategy-making than 'waging war amongst the people'. In the latter the people are treated as the passive objects of influence; in the former they become active participants in the formation of policy. However, as Obama's mixed messages on 1 May 2012 showed, the people in the theatre of war and the people at home are



not so easily separated, especially in a world whose reporting is so interconnected, and in which the transmission of news no longer lies exclusively in the hands of professional journalists or can be easily managed by governments. Today the message given in the theatre of operations cannot in practice diverge from that given at home without running the risk of inconsistency at best and direct self-contradiction at worst.

Both Obama and Cameron chose deadlines for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan which bore less relationship to the possible situation in Afghanistan than it did to the electoral cycles in their own countries. Their objectives were defined not so much in terms of identifiable objectives within Afghanistan and more in terms of what have come to be called 'exit strategies'. Exits are not strategies. Exits are means or possibly more accurately ways, but they are not endings. By admitting the role of democracy in strategy the leaders of democratic states have put themselves between a rock and a hard place. In order to explain to their nations why their armed forces are engaged in faraway places of which their peoples know little, they use the vocabulary of mass mobilisation borrowed from the Second World War. They are ready to let these wars be called 'wars of choice' but they employ phrases borrowed from 'existential' conflict, which suggest they are 'wars of necessity'. George W. Bush compared the 9/11 attacks with Pearl Harbor, and Tony Blair cited the appeasement of Hitler when calling for action against Saddam Hussein. President Obama was much more circumspect in his choice of words than his predecessor. By then many Americans were becoming war weary, and Obama may therefore have felt that he was responding to the wishes of the American people. But this also created challenges. The consequence of Obama's more measured approach was that he earned a reputation for indecision, for lack of clarity, and for a failure to provide the strategic leadership required not just by the United States but also by NATO and the west as a whole.

Britons too had become doubtful of the value of intervention by 2009-10. However, unlike Obama, David Cameron continued to use the language of Bush and Blair. Three times in his tenure as prime minister David Cameron spoke of an existential conflict, of a generational war, and of direct threats to the British way of life: in 2011 over Libya; in January 2013 after the al-Qaeda attack on a BP gas installation in Algeria; and in June 2015 after the Islamic State-inspired attack on British citizens in Sousse in Tunisia. As in Obama's case, his words created strategic uncertainty, albeit for different reasons. They exposed a gap between his rhetoric and his intent. He used big words but did less: during his premiership British society, although apparently engaged in multiple wars simultaneously, continued to look and behave as though it was at peace. Its domestic circumstances were characterised by levels of security which contradicted Cameron's calls to arms. His audience knew that Britain was not in the dire straits of summer 1940, and also knew that their lives were much safer than was the case for the inhabitants of many other parts of the contemporary world. The effect of democracy on strategic decision-making seems to be to encourage many national leaders to over-promise and under-deliver, or to over-dramatize and under-perform, when they should be under-promising and over-delivering. If substance matched rhetoric, Britain would have done much more than commit 2 percent of its GDP to defence in the Cameron years.

There is a conundrum here. Democratic leaders are under pressure to exaggerate the threat precisely because their electorates don't feel threatened, and yet the more they do so the less convinced their publics seem to be. Gordon Brown when prime minister explained the war in Afghanistan in terms which related to domestic security. He said British troops were fighting, killing and dying in Helmand to keep the streets of Britain safe. The public was not convinced – and nor were many of the soldiers who were deployed to Afghanistan to protect them.

Democracy has so associated itself with material and personal security, with the functioning of liberal capitalism, that it has divorced itself from war. The identity of the nation state itself has been weakened, on the one hand by its reliance for security on supra-national organisations like the United Nations, NATO and the European Union, and on the other by its transfer of what used to be state functions to private companies and multinational corporations. This process applies even within defence, with the growth of private military companies. Democracy has, furthermore, become associated with peace, not war. That was Woodrow Wilson's vision in 1917: he believed that democratic states could create a peaceful world order, and, for all the failure of the Versailles settlement of 1919, that ambition has not only survived but grown.¹ Democracies are characterised as

¹ Tony Smith, *Why Wilson matters: the origin of American liberal internationalism and its crisis today* (Princeton, 2017), is good on these points



risk- and casualty-averse; and they are seen as reluctant to be taxed in order to fund national, as opposed to medical or social, security.

Many of these hypotheses are exactly that, but they have achieved an authority almost independent of contingency in the form of democratic peace theory. In 1989 Jack Levy wrote that, 'the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations'.² True believers in democratic peace theory argue that democracies do not go to war with one another as a direct consequence of the character of democracy itself. Of course, democratic peace theory does not rule out democracies going to war with non-democracies, but that in itself raises the question of what a democracy is and what not. At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 Britain had the lowest level of male suffrage of any of the belligerents except Hungary. About 60 percent of British men had the vote; in Germany every male was able to vote. And yet Britain portrayed its war as one for democracy, an image that the Entente powers burnished, and the United States endorsed after it entered the conflict in 1917. The demarcation line that separates democratic from non-democratic government is more blurred than theory suggests. Even states that political scientists might classify as non-democracies are not necessarily states that lack mass participation in their political life: a point true not just of Wilhelmine Germany in the First World War but also of Nazi Germany in the Second. Neither of those German governments is conventionally described as a democracy, but both enjoyed periods of genuinely popular support. One man's political populism can be another man's democracy.

The assumption that populism is not democracy is a product of the master narrative of liberalism, an inheritor of the Whig view of history. Woodrow Wilson's conviction, that liberal democracy would produce not just domestic but also international harmony, was a belief which many of the wars of the last century were in part fought to prove, albeit with variable results. Its logical corollary is that democracies struggle to reconcile themselves to war and are therefore slow to undertake it. An inherent tension therefore exists between the two principal words in the title of this lecture, strategy and democracy. Historically, this is absurd: from classical Athens to modern America, democracies have waged war, and done so through a participatory decision-making process. Much of Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* is concerned with exactly this problem – the difficulties faced by Athens as a democracy in waging war coherently and consistently. However, for modern historians the story of democracy's engagement with strategy begins not with Thucydides but with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Indeed, the concept of strategy can itself be seen as a product of the Enlightenment.³

The idea of the democratic peace, after all, takes its argument from Immanuel Kant's essay on *Perpetual Peace*. Kant contended that republics would enjoy peace with other republics. He did so in 1795, when Europe was still exploring the foothills of a series of wars which would last another twenty years, and which were driven by the French republic fighting – or so it claimed – for liberty, equality and fraternity, against a league of absolute monarchies. Despite the horrors which the wars of the French Revolution brought to Europe, most revolutionaries, at least in 1795, would not have disagreed with Kant. The reason that France found itself at war, they believed, was not its fault but the responsibility of autocracies and absolute monarchies that failed to recognise the need to democratise by giving power to the people. The French were waging war to spread republicanism, which in turn would foster perpetual peace; this was 'a war to end all wars' to use a phrase from the next major European war fought a century later.⁴

Running against this narrative was a powerful alternative: the notion that democratisation was a tool for national mobilisation in time of war. A French officer, the aristocratic and enlightened comte de Guibert, first published his *Essai general de la tactique* anonymously in 1770, but it appeared under his own name in 1772 and in an English translation in 1781. Most of those who quote Guibert do so by citing a passage to which I shall return: 'Let us suppose in Europe, there was to spring up a vigorous people, with genius, with power, and a happy form of government; a set of people that to strict virtue, and a national soldiery, joined a fixed plan of aggrandizement,

² Quoted by Sean M. Lynn-Jones, in Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (eds), *Debating the democratic peace* (Cambridge Mass), p. ix

³ Joly de Maizeroy

⁴ T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: occupation and resistance in the Rhineland 1792-1802* (Oxford, 1983), and more generally Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars 1787-1802* (London, 1996); David A. Bell, *The first total war: Napoleon's Europe and the birth of modern warfare* (London, 2007)



who never lost sight of that system, who, knowing how to carry on a war with little expense, and so subsist by their conquests, was not reduced to the necessity of laying down their arms by the calculations of financiers’.

Guibert then proceeded to argue that, for France, the first step to a successful exterior policy was domestic reform: ‘Politics are naturally divided into parts, INTERIOR and EXTERIOR Politics. The first is as a basis for the second’. He went on, ‘Interior Politics, having thus prepared a state, with what facility external Politics can resolve upon the system of her own interests in opposition to her foreign ones, by the raising of a respectable military power! How easy it is to have armies invincible, in a state where its subjects are citizens, where they cherish and revere government, where they are fond of glory, where they are not intimidated at the idea of toiling for the general good!’

Guibert dedicated his book ‘to my Country’, not to his king, to whom as an army officer he owed allegiance. His idea of France included the monarch, the country’s ‘father’, but it also embraced its ministers or administrators, and its people or ‘its children’. He looked forward to the day when all France would be united. ‘May the Ruler and his Subjects, the high and low degrees of the community, with one accord, feel themselves honoured with the title of Citizens’.⁵

Guibert died on 6 May 1790. The French Revolution had yet to reach its apogee in the Terror, nor had the transformation of the French state yet revolutionised the structure of the French army. By 1795 both developments were obvious. Revolutionary France regarded those who opposed the logic of its own position, its conflation of the revolution with universal principles, as enemies caught in the vice of political backwardness. In the Vendée, Catholic, counter-revolutionary peasants were treated not as naïve and ill-educated, but as political actors conspiring against the revolution and its government. About a quarter of a million men, women and children, or 25 percent of the population of the Vendée, were exterminated by the revolutionary armies in the years 1793-4.⁶ Those armies were themselves politicised: their soldiers were now, in conformity with Guibert’s hopes, citizens.⁷ Democratisation became the agent, not of moderation in war, but of its intensification. Captain Dupuy wrote to his sister from the Vendée in January 1794: ‘Wherever we go we are bearing fire and death. Age, sex, nothing is being respected. Yesterday, one of our detachments burned a village. One volunteer killed three women with his own hands. It is atrocious, but the safety of the Republic demands it imperatively’.⁸

One reason for Dupuy’s sense of urgency related to the fact that Revolutionary France faced an external threat as well as an internal war: while it was dealing with counter-revolution in the Vendée, it was also fighting the War of the First Coalition against Britain, Austria and Prussia. If the enemy within was not eradicated, he could facilitate the enemy without. So, republicanism and revolutionary fervour fused with nationalism and patriotism. In 1797, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, a Hanoverian and the son of a non-commissioned officer, who had served with the Prussian army in the War of the First Coalition, published his general reflections on the armies in the French revolutionary wars. In particular he asked why those of France had fared as well as they had, given that they had purged most of their officers and overthrown their disciplinary systems. His answer was that the French army had been transformed by the revolution, by the political impetus given to its army as a result, and by the identification of the army with the nation. For Scharnhorst, as for other military reformers in the following decade, citizenship created soldiers with a stake in the nation, who were readier to fight and die because they had rights, than were the soldiers of pre-1789 autocracies.⁹

⁵ [Jacques-Antoine Hippolyte] Guibert, *A general essay on tactics. With an introductory discourse upon the present state of politics, and the military science in Europe* (2 vols, London, 1781), vol 1, pp viii, xxi, xxiii, v

⁶ Bell, *First total war*, p 156

⁷ Jean-Paul Bertaud, *The army of the French Revolution: from citizen-soldiers to instruments of power* (Princeton, 1988) describes this process

⁸ Bell, *First total war*, p 180; see also Blanning, *French Revolutionary Wars*, p.97; Jean-Clément, *La guerre de Vendée 1793-1800* (2nd edn, Paris, 2014)

⁹ ‘Entwicklung der allgemeinen Ursachen des Glücks der Franzosen in dem Revolutionskriege und insbesondere in dem Feldzuge von 1794’, published in *Neues militärisches Journal*, vol 8, 1797, pp 1-154, and reprinted in Gerhard von Scharnhorst, *Ausgewählte militärische Schriften*, ed Hansjürgen Usczek and Christa Gudzent (Berlin, 1986), pp 97-150. For a later iteration of similar points, see *Bemerkungen über die französische Armee der neuesten Zeit, oder der Epoche von 1792 bis 1807* (Königsberg, 1808; translated from the French), and more generally Thomas Hippler, *Soldats et citoyens: naissance du service militaire en France et Prusse* (Paris, 2006)



Prussia took no part in the wars with France between 1795 and the Jena campaign in 1806. Smashed by Napoleon in the latter year, it agreed humiliating terms at Tilsit in December 1807, and again stayed clear of war until 1812. Those Prussians who saw Napoleon as a tyrant looked enviously to Spain and Italy for evidence of effective popular resistance to French rule, waged by guerrillas and stoked by national sentiment. Scharnhorst was one of them, as were August von Gneisenau and Scharnhorst's protégé, Carl von Clausewitz. From 1809 Gneisenau and Clausewitz plotted a national insurgency against French occupation in defiance of the more complaisant attitude of their king, Friedrich Wilhelm III. When the king agreed to Napoleon's demand that Prussia supply a contingent for his invasion of Russia, all three were disgusted. In February 1812 Clausewitz sent a long, three-part memorandum to Gneisenau, in which he called on the German nation to wage a war of national liberation; it should mobilise the entire population, be ready to use terror, and prepare itself to die rather than admit defeat. He specifically quoted Guibert, albeit without acknowledgment, calling for 'a people, with genius, with power, and a happy form of government'.¹⁰

This was the Clausewitz who, when he came to write book VIII, chapter 3 of *On War*, identified the French Revolution as having put the state's mobilisation for war on a new and unprecedented level. 'Suddenly war again [the last example in Clausewitz's view was that of ancient Rome] became the business of the people – a people of thirty million, all of whom considered themselves to be citizens... The people became a participant in war; instead of governments and armies as heretofore, the full weight of the nation was thrown into the balance.'¹¹

The question for Clausewitz was whether this would be the pattern for the future: 'From now on, will every war in Europe be waged with the full resources of the state, and therefore have to be fought only over major issues that affect the people? Or shall we again see a gradual separation taking place between government and people?'

¹² Clausewitz was clear about the 'enormous contribution the heart and temper of the nation can make to the sum total of its politics, war potential and fighting strength'.¹³

In book I of *On War* Clausewitz described war as being made up of three parts, passion, the play of probability and chance, and reason. He then associated each of these qualities, the so-called 'trinity', with three particular groups of actors in war – passion with the people, the play of probability and chance with the army and its commander, and reason with the government. But he also made clear, in a way which far too many modern readers neglect, that these relations were not fixed. He did not rule out a people that was both passionate and rational: indeed, much else that he wrote about early nineteenth century warfare was conditional on the realisation that European civilisation did not preclude the need to abandon moderation in war and embrace terror. Nor was the relationship between war and policy fixed in the trinity: it too could fluctuate, with the rational element of policy submerged by passion or by the contingencies of the battlefield. The problem with recent, predominantly Anglophone readings of *On War*, is their determination to nest it in a view of modern strategy that sees a linear relationship between policy and war, that believes the former invariably limits the latter, and that the making of strategy is settled by an elite relationship between politicians and generals that excludes the people. The effect is to subordinate the roles of both passion and the people.¹⁴

To be fair, after the defeat of Napoleon, Clausewitz colluded in this process. The blandishments of peace and of a settled domestic life moderated his Francophobic anger. The peacemakers saw the French Revolution as the fount of twenty years of war in Europe. It had transformed warfare into something protracted, destructive and, to use a neologism not then coined, total. Preventing revolution could prevent war, and separating revolution from war was high on the list of most monarchs when they met in Vienna in 1815. Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia was among them. Unbeknownst to the king, Clausewitz's memorandum of 1812 had questioned his authority by appealing to the German nation over his head: fortunately for Clausewitz, the memorandum was not published in either of their lifetimes. However, Friedrich Wilhelm was well aware of Clausewitz's insubordination. He had defied the king's wishes by resigning from the Prussian army to serve in that of Russia so that he could fight the

¹⁰ The full text of the three statements is in Carl von Clausewitz, *Schriften, Aufsätze, Studien, Briefe* (2 vols in 3, Göttingen, 1966-90), ed Werner Hahlweg, vol 1, 682-750; for the quotations from Guibert, see pp 710-11

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans and ed Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, 1976), 5, p. 592

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 593

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 220; here the translators have rendered the German *Politik* as policies; they could equally have rendered it as 'policy'.

¹⁴ See Christopher Bassford, 'The primacy of policy and the "trinity" in Clausewitz's mature thought', in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2007)



French, and he continued to rile him in the years immediately after the war as he and others fought to retain the military and social reforms which the need to defeat Napoleon had forced the king to adopt.

At their apex, at least for Clausewitz, stood the *Landwehr*, a national militia raised by conscription and hallowed in the minds of the reformers by its part in the defeat of Napoleon in 1813. For Clausewitz the *Landwehr* enabled the creation of a mass army in time of war, but it also ‘touches the entire people’, ‘affects the way the people live’, and was ‘an expression of the absolute power of the nation’. As he summarised it: ‘The ability to produce a greater – indeed a much greater – force in time of war for the same cost, with no fixed limit, to infuse the entire people with a warlike spirit, to bind the army and the people together, drawing upon the strength of the whole nation in a defensive struggle – these are the main advantages of the *Landwehr* system’. Its opponents, he argued, were snobbish noblemen who could not bear to serve in the ranks with peasants, men whom they regarded as ‘not really citizens’, but subjects. Nor could they abide the thought of their sons serving under officers who were the sons of grocers. He rubbished too those opponents of the *Landwehr* who feared that by arming the people the state would facilitate revolution. Clausewitz argued that revolution had more profound causes than this, and that ‘to believe in the possibility of such a disruption of our present circumstances would be to believe in ghosts, and to ignore external danger because of this illusory evil would be to embrace death for fear of dying’.¹⁵

After 1819 Clausewitz realised that, if he wanted preferment in post-war Prussia, he had better moderate his language. He ceased writing broadsides calling for military reform that carried political and democratising implications, and in doing so he reflected a broader current in military thought. The idealistic conflation of citizenship and military service, of political awareness and the defence of the nation, was moderated after 1815, and not just in Prussia. Armies served less as instruments for national mobilisation and more as tools of counter-revolutionary domestic order. The debate about democratisation and war became bound up above all with the idea of the nation in arms, of military service and its terms. Conscription became less a manifestation of liberalism and political awareness, as in its idealised form in the 1790s, and more a mechanism for social control. The revolutions of 1830, especially in France where locally based units joined the insurgents, as they had done in 1789-91, stoked enough fear to cause governments to double down on their efforts.¹⁶ They succeeded. Although the action of Stendhal’s great novel, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, published in 1839, is focused in Italy, it begins with its hero, Fabrice del Dongo, then a teenager, joining Napoleon in *The Hundred Days*; much of the plot is then played out in a world of princely courts and ecclesiastical hierarchies as Fabrice lives down the revolutionary credentials he has acquired through his youthful idealism. Broadly speaking, in 1848, as revolution whipped through Europe’s major cities, armies remained loyal to their governments. In the run-up to the First World War the mass armies of European states may have matched themselves against each other, but they had one eye fixed on the enemy within, especially as industrialisation and urbanisation fed the growth of trades unions and political socialism. In 1907 the German general staff prepared a memorandum on fighting in insurgent towns, and the army, despite its desire for more men, held back from recruiting too heavily in such areas.¹⁷ In France the army was the principal tool for maintaining public order until 1921: one future First World War general was asked by his mother why he wanted to follow a career which consisted of confronting and breaking strikes.¹⁸

By 1914 mass armies could be raised without so much attention being paid to the corollary that they should see themselves as politically aware partners in the making of national strategy. The debate remained most vibrant in France, with socialists arguing that citizen soldiers would fight purely defensive wars. In *L’armée nouvelle*, published in 1910, Jean Jaurès used the example of the armies of the French revolution to ram home this point. In 1916, by contrast, Britain adopted conscription despite the fact that the limitations on male suffrage meant that many of those called upon to defend their country were not fully-fledged citizens. The association between

¹⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, ‘Our military institutions’ (1819), in *Historical and political writings*, ed and trans Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton, 1992), pp 316-28, esp 323 et seq.

¹⁶ Douglas Porch, *Army and revolution: France 1815-1848* (London, 1974)

¹⁷ Bernd Ulrich, Jakob Vogel and Benjamin Ziemann, *Untertan in Uniform: Militär und Militarismus im Kaiserreich 1871-1914. Quellen und Dokumente* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001), pp 163-5; see also Nicholas Stargardt, *The German idea of militarism: radical and socialist critics, 1866-1914* (Cambridge, 1994), pp 93-6.

¹⁸ André Corvisier (ed), *Histoire militaire de la France* (4 vols, Paris, 1992-4), vol3, pp 13-14; André Bach, *L’armée de Dreyfus: une histoire politique de l’armée française de Charles X à l’“affaire”* (Paris, 2004), pp 209-19; Douglas Porch, *The march to the Marne: the French army 1871-1914* (Cambridge, 1981), pp 102, 106-9



military service and citizenship was manifested after the event, not before it, and negatively rather than positively. When the franchise was extended to all men aged over 21 in 1918, those who had served but not yet reached that age were included, and conscientious objectors were temporarily excluded.¹⁹

By then all the armies of the major belligerents were effectively citizen armies, subject to the currents of opinion voiced by their friends and families at home, and linked to them by leave, literacy and efficient postal services. Commanders realised that they needed to provide political education in order to sustain morale at the front. In July 1917 Germany introduced a system of patriotic instruction: normally condemned as ineffective, it is perhaps ripe for re-examination given the resilience of the German army into 1918.²⁰ In France, Philippe Pétain, appointed commander-in-chief in succession to Georges Robert Nivelle in May 1917, responded to the mutinies in the army with a determination to give soldiers more information on the general strategic situation.²¹ British reactions to similar problems were crystallised on 1 January 1918 with an educational programme which embraced the political context of the war, British war aims and Britain's post-war vision. From the summer of 1918 it was in the hands of Major Lord Gorell, who in 1914 had been the editor of the *Times Educational Supplement*.²² In revolutionary Russia M.V. Frunze in particular argued that its soldiers needed to be politically aware. For the Bolsheviks the army became a vehicle for educating peasants, not just so that they would have the skills to be better soldiers but also so that they would be committed socialists. In the civil war command was divided, with political commissars responsible for political as opposed to military direction, but from 1925 the adoption of unitary command progressively passed this responsibility on to the unit commanders. By 1932 some units devoted 200 hours a year to political education.²³ In the Second World War most armies provided education in the war aims and value systems for which they required their soldiers to fight. Such approaches were not just the prerogatives of the Red Army or the Wehrmacht but were adopted by the armed forces of the liberal democracies, including Britain and the United States.

The combination of compulsory military service, citizenship and political education, the aspiration of reformers and revolutionaries at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, peaked in the two world wars. At one level the inspiration for these schemes was positive: conscription created an educational opportunity which would in turn produce more aware and better motivated soldiers. But at another level the whole project was a manifestation of fear – fear of pacifist propaganda, fear of subversive ideology, and fear of revolution or counter-revolution. By the second half of the twentieth century those who were motivated to fight for political reasons had become insurgents, radicals and revolutionaries. In Jean Lartéguy's novel, *The Centurions*, published in 1960, Captain Jacques de Glatigny, a French aristocratic officer captured at Dien Bien Phu in the French Indo-China War, defends a brother officer who has been accused of becoming a Communist while a prisoner of the Vietminh because he has learnt the principles of revolutionary war. Glatigny's senior officer asserts that the army must re-establish its traditions and to do that it must 'separate the sheep from the goats'. Glatigny replies, 'In that case, General, we're all of us goats – all who were in the marquis in France, who served in the First Army or the F.F.L., who took part in the Indo-China campaign, in the fighting units, all who believe that the army depends on the people just as a fish depends on water. That's what Mao-Tse-Tung wrote, and it's because we ignored his theories on revolutionary warfare that we deserved our crushing defeat.'²⁴

Lartéguy's own career in many respects mirrored that of the fictional Glatigny. By serving with the Free French in the Second World War, he fought to overthrow the Vichy government headed by Philippe Pétain himself and supported by many officers who respected the 'traditions' of the French army. Having been wounded, he covered France's wars of decolonisation as a war correspondent and journalist. However, the process by which the politically aware fighter became once again suspect, as he had been in the aftermath of the French

¹⁹ Martin Pugh, *Electoral reform in war and peace* (London, 1978)

²⁰ 'Leitsätze für den vaterländischen Unterricht unter den Truppen, 29 Juli 1917', in Herbert Michaelis, Ernst Schraepler and Günter Scheel (eds), *Ursachen und Folgen: vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart* (3 vols, Berlin, [1958]), vol 1, pp 220–3

²¹ Guy Pedroncini, *Les mutineries de 1917* (Paris, 1967), pp 254–6

²² S.P. Mackenzie, *Politics and military morale: current affairs and citizenship education in the British army 1914–1950* (Oxford, 1992), pp 4–30

²³ Alexander Hill, *The Red Army and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2017), pp 15–18

²⁴ Jean Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, trans Xan Fielding (first published Paris, 1960; New York, 2015) pp 247–8



Revolution and Napoleon, began not with the wars which Lartéguy experienced, but earlier, with the First World War itself.

The war of 1914-18 changed the relationship between revolution and war. Popular mobilisation and political awareness, universal suffrage and mass press, made the 'people' full participants in war. However, they also made them a source of potential vulnerability. In the Napoleonic Wars, revolution had led to war; in the First World War, war led to revolution. As the crisis of July 1914 unfolded several of its leading protagonists expressed the fear that that would be the case. The more conservative advisors to Tsar Nicholas II warned him of the danger, with good reason given that the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 had been followed by revolution. The German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, expressed similar views, and the belief that the lamps were going out all over Europe, attributed to the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, can also be understood in this context.²⁵ They were right. From the outset of the war Germany aimed to export revolution to the empires of its enemies, Britain, France and Russia, and it did so not just in a colonial context, but also to Dublin in 1916 and Petrograd in 1917. Britain did the same, fomenting revolution to undermine the Ottoman Empire, especially in Arabia, and by 1917-18 the allies were ready to do so in Germany and Austria-Hungary. Democracy had become a weakness as well as a strength through its capacity for mass mobilisation. After 1918 Britain's blockade of Germany became rationalised as the instrument that had persuaded the German people to turn against their Kaiser and to overthrow their government in the final stages of the war.

In 1939 Britain planned to use economic warfare against Germany once more, but by the summer of 1940 German forces stood on the Atlantic coast from the North Cape to western France, so making a blockade on the lines of 1914-18 impossible, and a year later they commanded most of central and eastern Europe as well, thus rendering it largely redundant. In its stead, by the winter of 1941-2 the strategic bombing offensive had been fashioned into an instrument designed to target German civilian morale. The ideas of Giulio Douhet with regard to the use of airpower in modern war arose precisely from his awareness of the relationship between citizenship and modern war. The belligerent populations of 1914-18 were responsible political actors in their own right, who could therefore be attacked as active participants in war even if they were civilians and non-combatants.²⁶ In 1944 allied intelligence searched for evidence of German collapse through another 'stab in the back' on the same lines as in 1918.²⁷ In the First World War, allied assessments of German opinion had divided reasonable liberals, who were open to compromise, from Prussian militarists, who were not; they encouraged the former to prioritise their political beliefs over their national identity. Hitler and the Nazis, precisely because they believed in this explanation for Germany's defeat, sought to prevent its recurrence: in this at least they succeeded.

In the narratives of the ultimate victors in both world wars their own populations were united, robust and loyal; it was the peoples subject to authoritarian regimes who had proved brittle and fragile. The presumption here was that the offer of democratisation would cause the people to turn against their own autocratic leaders and embrace their invaders: a presumption put to the test in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and found wanting.

Between 1945 and the end of the Cold War, the western democracies did not have to address the role of the people in the making of strategy at any sustained or serious level. Their armed forces were actively engaged in the wars fought as part of their withdrawal from empire. The promoters of democracy were now not their own governments but the colonial resistance movements. Students from Europe to the United States put posters of Ché Guevara on their walls and read Frantz Fanon's *The wretched of the earth* (1961). Fanon, a doctor who fought with the FLN in Algeria, saw the use of violence as a necessary route to decolonisation and democratisation. Guevara and Fanon were the icons of the enemy, not the constituent elements of a trinity in the making of national strategy.

At home, nuclear weapons made the people potential targets of attack, as they had been in the Second World War, but now they were perpetually bound as hostages to deterrence. They became passive pawns more than potentially active participants whose loyalties could be undermined by the effects of sustained conventional

²⁵ D.C.B Lieven, *Russia and the origins of the First World War* (London, 1983), pp 77-80

²⁶ Giulio Douhet, *Command of the air* (first published 1921; London, 1943); for similar thinking, see Basil Liddell Hart, *Paris, or the future of war* (London, 1925); Thomas Hippler, *Bombing the people: Giulio Douhet and the foundations of air-power strategy, 1884-1939* (Cambridge, 2013) makes the democratic links clear.

²⁷ F. H. Hinsley and others, *British intelligence in the Second World War: its influence on strategy and operations* (4 vols, London, 1979-90), 3/2, p 365; Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (London, 2014)



bombing. When they protested against their role in the nexus of deterrence, as they did through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or through opposition to Cruise missiles, they were identified with the subversive influences of the putative enemy, as working against the state, not strengthening it.

Nuclear weapons demobilised the democratic resilience of western governments in two more direct ways. First, they reinforced the case against the mass army. In Britain specifically, the 1957 Defence White Paper simultaneously embraced nuclear deterrence and rejected conscription. Other countries went down similar routes, but more slowly. The United States ended the draft and adopted the All-Volunteer Force in response to defeat in the Vietnam War. Most European states moved to professional armed forces after the end of the Cold War. In 1997-8 even France, the spiritual and intellectual home of the nation in arms, ended conscription. Democracies no longer presumed that going to war would require the active collective participation of their citizens.

That broke the physical link between citizenship and strategy; more surprisingly the fiscal link was disrupted too. Nuclear weapons were a cheap option. They enabled states to maintain a massively destructive capability at a containable cost, while not engaging in active hostilities. In 1799 William Pitt had introduced income tax precisely to fund war; in 1842 Sir Robert Peel was the first British prime minister to apply it in peace time, but he still saw it as an emergency and temporary measure. William Ewart Gladstone, who became President of the Board of Trade in Peel's government the following year, believed, as Peel did, that continuing to treat income tax as a war tax would suppress the British voters' appetite for war. As prime minister, he realised that was not the case, but income tax did have another effect. Given that tax rates had to be approved by parliament, taxation provided a form of wider participation in the decision-making process which war required. By and large late Victorians escaped direct service in the navy or the army as Britain did not adopt national service, but they did put their hands in their pockets to pay for defence, and especially for the navy.²⁸ The citizens of democratic states may not have had to serve their country in war, as did those of ancient Rome or revolutionary France, but they funded their defence from their own hard-earned incomes, and consented in the process. That relationship was weakened in the Cold War by the savings Britain and its NATO allies made on conventional capabilities through their reliance on nuclear weapons. It was definitively broken after 2003.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the wars waged by western democracies since the 9/11 attacks in 2001 is that they were presented as effectively cost-free. The decisions to invade Afghanistan and then Iraq were not accompanied by major statements from governments as to how they would be funded. Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes have estimated that the eventual overall expenditure, including such indirect costs as long-term medical care for the wounded, interest payments on the borrowing which war necessitated, and the opportunity costs of going to war in the first place, would total \$3 trillion.²⁹ That was for the United States alone. Similar points can be made for the United Kingdom. Neither Tony Blair nor Gordon Brown mobilised the people of Britain for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan by asking them to fund Britain's military effort through increased taxation or through austerity. Instead the democracies hid the accumulating costs of war and struggled to answer direct questions designed to elicit them. Most modern wars have been funded largely by borrowing; the function of taxation has been to mop up excessive demand and dampen inflation. When the credit crisis of 2008-9 caused an economic crash, nobody turned to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for explanations, as governments had turned to the First World War in the depression of the early 1920s. Democratic states, despite being conditioned to cut defence expenditure in peacetime, proved unable even to ask about the role of waging protracted war in expanding defence costs and creating national deficits.

Both directly and indirectly, the place of democracy in the making of strategy – through the active participation of the citizen soldier or through the indirect contribution of the enfranchised taxpayer – had been marginalised by the beginning of the 21st century. The consequence is that the making of strategy is no longer trinitarian in a Clausewitzian sense. Moreover, western democracies have adopted a model of civil-military relations designed to reflect that – one which specifically excludes the people from the relationship, certainly in so far as it involves the formation of strategy.

²⁸ Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the pursuit of empire: the political economy of British imperialism 1860-1912* (Cambridge, 1986), pp 223-6; Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In defense of naval supremacy: finance, technology and British naval policy, 1899-1914* (Boston, 1989), pp 196,336

²⁹ Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War* (London, 2008)



In 1957 Samuel Huntington published *The Soldier and the State*, a book which still remains a standard text on civil-military relations. Although it referred to the experiences of other countries and took the examples of Germany and Japan as cautionary tales, its core problem was that confronted by the United States. At the outset, Huntington posed a specific question: ‘what pattern of civil-military relations will best maintain the security of the American nation?’³⁰ Two of the book’s three parts were devoted entirely to America. The question was fresh because after the end of the Second World War in 1945 the United States did not simply demobilise and reduce its armed forces. In maintaining a sizeable military establishment in peacetime, it had – or so Huntington argued – introduced a significant new actor in the making of policy.

The United States of the American Revolution, like France in 1789, had had to embrace what Huntington called ‘subjective military control’: the idea that the citizen soldier would, by virtue of the combination of civic rights and military obligations, become the symbol of national will, and that political intent and military capability would be fused in one.³¹ The militia’s central position as the ‘constitutional force’ had British roots but its legacy survives in the US as it does not in the United Kingdom. Those who defend the second amendment to the constitution, that which asserts the individual’s right to own arms, forget that it was originally contingent on the existence of a now defunct organisation, the militia. Its justification rested on the reciprocal civic obligation to serve.³²

Huntington rejected this inheritance as a model for the United States in the Cold War, reasonably enough given that the threats it now faced were neither from loyalists to the north nor from an open frontier to the west. Instead he stressed what he called ‘objective military control’, an idea which, as he acknowledged, had no foundation in the constitution: that the armed forces are subordinated to the civilian direction of the government.³³ Governments may be elected by the people in order to serve them, but the central relationship in Huntington’s ‘objective military control’ is not that with the people, but that between elites, the president and his cabinet on the one hand and the professional heads of the armed forces on the other. In 2010, this was the model of civil-military relations which required President Obama to sack General Stanley McChrystal as the Commander-in-Chief of ISAF in 2010 because of an off-the-record remark in which he criticised the president’s strategy in Afghanistan.

Huntington’s book addressed an American problem at a particular stage of its development. It does not follow that its model still applies sixty years after its conception, in very different situations from the early Cold War. Today’s problems are those of war, not peace, albeit not the ‘major’ war whose threat underpinned Huntington’s thinking. The armed forces of the United States are no longer drafted but are fully professionalised, and they now usually expect to fight with allies, many of whom – even when they are also democracies – have different political inheritances. Yet, none of these considerations has prevented the export of the Huntingtonian model of objective military control. This happened quite specifically under the terms of NATO’s ‘partnership for peace’ as the states of central and eastern Europe emerged from Communist rule after the end of the Cold War.³⁴ It has happened more subliminally in the case of established democracies like France and Britain. Public utterances on defence matters from military professionals are condemned because they challenge a core assumption of ‘objective military control’, that the professional soldier is by definition apolitical.

In July 2017, the French chief of the defence staff, Pierre de Villiers, opposed the defence cuts proposed by the government, his off-the-record remarks being reported by *Le Monde*. As a result, he drew fire from the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, not least in a speech the latter delivered to the armed forces on the eve of the Bastille Day parade. De Villiers resigned three days later, on 17 July, saying that it had become his duty to do so, because he had a responsibility ‘to tell the truth about the threats we must face and the challenges to our armed forces. In that way, the people of France will be able the better to understand.’³⁵ Macron called de Villiers’ behaviour undignified.

³⁰Samuel P. Huntington, *The soldier and the state: the theory and politics of civil-military relations* (Cambridge Mass, 1957), p. 3

³¹ *Ibid*, pp 164-6

³² H. Richard Uviller and William G. Merkel, *The Militia and the right to bear arms, or how the second amendment fell silent* (Durham, NC, 2002)

³³ Huntington, *The soldier and the state*, pp 163-4

³⁴ See the essays in David Betz and John Löwenhardt (eds), *Army and state in postcommunist Europe* (London, 2001)

³⁵ Pierre de Villiers, *Servir* (Paris, 2017), quotation on the cover



De Villiers was the first chief of defence to resign in the history of the 5th Republic, but between 1946 and 1958 the story of the 4th Republic was, like its predecessors, dominated by tensions along the civil-military fault-line, partly as a result of the legacy of the Vichy government but ignited too by the French wars in Indo-China and Algeria. Those experiences – which occurred as Huntington was writing *The Soldier and the State* – demonstrated the problems of applying ‘objective military control’ in practice. Jean Lartéguy’s battle-hardened hero, de Glatigny, responds when told ‘The army’s one thing, politics another’: ‘All warfare is bound to become political, Colonel, and an officer with no political training will soon prove ineffective’.³⁶ Pierre de Villiers made a similar point when reflecting on the effects of contemporary conflict, which ‘creates an ambiguity at all levels in identifying the enemy, in evaluating the threat, in appreciating the situation, in setting objectives, in deciding the means’. In such circumstances, ‘the dealings between the political power, the sole decision-maker in the last resort, and the general staff find themselves modified. They suppose a constant relationship, a sustained dialogue, a mutual confidence.’³⁷

In Britain, as in the United States and France, both sides have struggled to meet the goals set by de Villiers. In 2011 David Cameron told the Chief of the Defence Staff, David Richards, that it was Richards’s job to do the fighting and that he would do the talking; Cameron may have been irked by Richards (allegedly) reminding him that service in the Combined Cadet Force at Eton did not qualify him to judge on complex military operations.³⁸ There is a more serious point here. The United Kingdom’s National Security Council, set up by David Cameron in 2010, rests on the model of objective military control. The Chief of the Defence Staff attends, but as an advisor, not a full member. What it does not recognise is the principle of subjective military control. The most significant long-term strategic decision taken by the Cameron government concerned the next generation of nuclear weapons, the successor to the Trident missiles and the submarines on which they would be based. Their procurement renews Britain’s long-term security dependence on the United States, carries significant opportunity costs for British defence in the early 2020s, and implicitly puts the British population at risk should they fail as a deterrent. One might have thought that decisions of such magnitude would demand of democracy a major national debate. In reality both government and opposition proved anxious to minimise discussion, not promote it.

Opinion polls in 2015 showed the British public to be divided on the value of a new deterrent, but with a small majority in favour. That included Scotland, although it did not stop the country’s former First Minister, Alex Salmond, arguing on 17 September 2015 that a unilateral decision by the United Kingdom government to renew the nuclear deterrent could be one of four conditions which would justify the Scottish government in calling for a second referendum on Scottish independence.³⁹ Although he liked to present nuclear deterrence as a specifically Scottish issue, it is not. It divides the Labour party, and many Conservatives think there are more important defence capabilities on which the money could be spent. Publicly, however, the political parties polarise the debate in crass over-simplifications. Those in favour of the nuclear deterrent assert that Britain does not know what threats may emerge in 50 years’ time: a truism which does not address the threats of today. Those who oppose say that nuclear weapons will not deter suicide bombers: another truism but one only relevant to one sort of threat.

If electorates are not informed about and involved in the making of national strategy, they cannot be expected to identify with the objectives of that strategy. Their perceptions, that they believe soldiers are victims, not victors, and that they themselves belong to societies that are inherently casualty averse, become self-fulfilling prophecies because of the poverty of informed debate. That in turn both undermines deterrence and inhibits national leaders from timely action. If potential opponents believe that democracies are inherently risk averse and unlikely to use force, then democracies’ defence policies lack deterrent strength, as both Saddam Hussein and Vladimir Putin seem to have concluded in 2002 and 2013 respectively.

After 2009 and the election of President Obama, the United States adopted a more limited means for waging what was presented as a ‘long war’ (the title of ‘the global war on terror’ having been formally abandoned). Instead of ‘boots on the ground’, western governments preferred a mix of air attacks, using both manned

³⁶ Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, p. 247

³⁷ De Villiers, *Servir*, p. 225

³⁸ ‘Top military chiefs “sidelined” after Afghanistan row, *Daily Telegraph*, 24 June 2011; Dan Hodges, ‘Generals talking about politics should remember who’s the boss’, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 September 2015

³⁹ Alex Salmond interview, *Independent*, 17 September 2015.



aircraft and weaponised drones, supplemented on the ground by special forces and training teams for indigenous 'proxies'. This was a solution which elevated means into ends, which made viable tactical options a strategy in their own right, one most visible in Northern Iraq and Syria, but developed in Pakistan and Yemen. But it has not worked. As in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11, tactical and operational successes have yet to be converted into political solutions. One reason is that Obama's approach failed to address Rupert Smith's 'war amongst the people'. Many of those who live in theatres of war, finding that their security concerns were marginalised, opted to migrate to Europe. However, as importantly, the strategy did not work for the people at home in western democracies, for four reasons.

First, the articulation of the idea of limited war remained totally inadequate. The means which western governments allocated to wars were comparatively small, but they did not adjust their ends accordingly. They used the vocabulary not of limited war, but of major war, which in turn carried the assumption that these wars would have to end in unequivocal outcomes. Limited wars do not tend to end so clearly. As a result, means and ends have remained consistently out of step and have frequently contradicted each other.

Secondly, in the Cold War, governments could engage in limited wars, often using only special forces and proxies, but do so without full disclosure to their peoples. Today the revolution in digital communications and the mobilisation of mass media make this effectively impossible. The fear of the media's power can promote excessive caution in engaging with it, so preventing its early and effective use. The result is a paradox: democratic governments, confronted with powerful agents for mass mobilisation and democratisation, stand transfixed in the headlights, uncertain how to use instruments largely of their own invention.

Thirdly, this approach to war relies for its execution on the efforts and readiness to die (and kill) of others – the proxies. However, they, the Kurds, the Free Syrian Army, the Libyan militias, the Afghan National Security Forces, and others, have their own political agendas which are not subordinated to the will of western governments. By relying on proxies, the latter have effectively separated the waging of war from their own political objectives, and so deprived themselves of the opportunity of shaping the outcome which an army on the ground could help provide.

Fourthly, western governments struggle to produce a narrative which reconciles overseas wars with the needs of their national security. Calling wars fought in the Middle East or Central Asia wars of choice but clothing them as wars of necessity, they fuel the scepticism of those at home to whom such narratives are addressed. After all, an effective strategic narrative cannot exist in its own right; it depends in the first place on a coherent strategy.

For all their apparent differences from their predecessors, the new generation of leaders in those western states inclined to use military force in the pursuit of policy, France, Britain and the United States, show a remarkable consistency. For France, the reason is simple: there is a national and largely non-partisan consensus around the issues. Emmanuel Macron is on the same page as François Hollande on these issues, as was Nicolas Sarkozy before them. In the United States, Donald Trump fought an election on the cry of 'America First', so using domestic opinion to shape his declared approach to foreign policy. However, he has had to confront the reality that, as the world's foremost military power, the United States finds itself globally engaged whether it likes it or not. When Trump was elected, Britain's prime minister, Theresa May, beat a path to this door. On her arrival in the United States, she delivered a speech in which she said that the days of the two countries intervening in order to remake overseas governments were finished. But her own government's National Security Strategy of September 2015 committed it to the creation of a joint task force by 2025, built round a carrier group, a deployable division, and the appropriate air assets. Britain, like the United States, has customarily projected its military force in expeditionary fashion. The peoples of what used to be called the 'free world' are right to be confused when their leaders' speeches don't reflect the nature of their states' military capabilities or their potential applications.

The people are the basis of national defence, and every citizen needs to understand his or her role in its delivery. In early 2018 Theresa May responded to the effects of 'fake news' and Russian misinformation by setting up the National Security Communications Unit. This could have been seen as a moment when the British government recognised the need to embrace its own citizens in the debate on strategy; instead the British press saw it as a device to prevent them from being enlisted on the side of their rivals. If western governments appreciated that distinction and sought solutions accordingly, they would – by reintegrating strategy with democracy – acquire the domestic resilience they seek and so also address the links between internal security and the external threats



with which they are increasingly preoccupied. Instead of looking at the latter through a tightly focused telescope from a great distance, they might pause for a moment of self-reflection in the mirror somewhat closer to them.

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