VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1

SUMMER 2023

# MILITARY STRATEGY MAGAZINE

*Linking Ends and Means*

*Hugh Smith*

**Co-Opting Clausewitz: Using *On War* to Explain Success and Failure in the War in Ukraine**

*M.L.R. Smith*

**The Roots of Bad Strategy**

*David Betz*

**Civil War Comes to the West**

*Jon Klug*

**Establishing the Realm of the Possible: Logistics and Military Strategy**

*Jonathan R. Beloff*

**The Missing Strategic Theory Link in African Conflicts**

*Vincent J. Carchidi*

**Should Strategists Worry About the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence?**

Military Strategy Magazine
ISSN 2708-3071

The IJ Infinity Group, Ltd.
Company number: 514895630
Bar Kochva 15/15
6342619
Tel Aviv, Israel
Website: https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com
Email: info@militarystrategymagazine.com

Publishing Co., **The IJ Infinity Group, Ltd.**

Publisher **A. E. Stahl**
aestahl@militarystrategymagazine.com

Editor **William F. Owen**
william@militarystrategymagazine.com



Subscribe For Free

Military Strategy Magazine is distributed via **www.militarystrategymagazine.com**

Contact

If you'd like to contact an editor regarding submission of articles see **militarystrategymagazine.com/contact**

Advertising Equiries

Interested in advertising in Military Strategy Magazine? **adverts@militarystrategymagazine.com**

# MILITARY STRATEGY MAGAZINE

**Military Strategy Magazine (MSM), formerly Infinity Journal, is a privately funded strategy journal, founded in London and based out of Tel Aviv, Israel.**



Volume 9, Issue 1, Summer 2023

# Editorial

"It does not matter that strategy in our common meaning of the word, distinctive from tactics, did not appear in English, French, German, or Italian, until the 1770s, our ancestors of all races and persuasions conducted strategy as the use of available means in effective ways to achieve political ends." More than any other quote, it is Colin Gray's words that best suit this specific issue of *Military Strategy Magazine*.

Language evolves and words both gain and lose meaning over time. While this is the natural course of communication throughout history, it can, at times, cause problems. After all, words matter. Considering that the word 'Strategy', not to mention 'War', "has forfeited conceptual clarity," [Strachan 2007] we thought it was important to briefly restate what Strategy is. This is important, not just for our own general knowledge but more specifically so that we may better understand the insightful articles in this issue, however contentious you may find one or more to be.

Clausewitz defined Strategy as "the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war" – with "engagement" denoting organized violence and "purpose" conveying the political condition being sought. He viewed Strategy as war's "most dominant" and "most important aspect". His definition resulted from detailed studies of more than 130 military campaigns, and it also was a direct result of his first-hand experience in, among others, the Revolutionary and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars. To be clear, utilizing Clausewitz's definition of war is not an Argument from Authority, as we use various others, and strategic history in general, when discussing Strategy. Utilizing it is merely a way to most accurately and succinctly describe a complex activity that has been carried out for thousands of years.

We must also remember that Strategy is neither state nor nonstate-centric. it applies to all policymaking groups, and while *particular* strategies may be cultural and context specific, Strategy itself is not [Handel 2001]. Throughout the thousands of years of the history of war and its warfare – from early Mesopotamian kingdoms and ancient empires, to "feudal lords", clans, tribes, the "trading cities of the Middle Ages", contemporary historical empires, and current states and nonstate actors (Mexican drug cartels, Hamas, Proud Boys) – all have engaged in this deportment in an attempt to link violence to the ends of policy being sought. However arguable, it may prove more useful and instructive to only utilize the term Strategy, rather than attach certain adjectives such as 'grand' or even 'military', as it may be more constructive to understand 'military strategy' as a military or armed forces' contribution to the chosen strategy. The reason is that Strategy is ultimately about making use of organized violence for policy ends. It is more than the application of organized violence, and it is not about any and all instruments of power for whatever pursued political condition.

As noted above, language evolves, and we at *Military Strategy Magazine* are not trying to stop the inevitable or control the narrative. However, in regard to discussions on an activity that involves an incredible amount of responsibility given the stakes involved, we will always aim for clarity, a level of continuity, and simplicity. If we stray too far from those objectives, then those thinking about or 'doing' Strategy will lose the plot altogether, which is far too high of a price to pay when peoples' lives are at risk.

**The IJ Group**
*Military Strategy Magazine*
September 2023

# Contents


## Co-Opting Clausewitz: Using *On War* to Explain Success and Failure in the War in Ukraine 4

*Hugh Smith*

Clausewitz's analysis of war has frequently been used to explain wars since his time, including the current war in Ukraine. His ideas of defence as a stronger form of warfare and of the centre of gravity of a campaign are examined and some of the pitfalls in applying those ideas are pointed out.

## The Roots of Bad Strategy 10

*M.L.R. Smith*

Not nearly enough effort is devoted to uncovering the roots of bad strategy. Bad strategy, this analysis suggests, resides in an inability to engage in proportionate actions arising from the persistence of a total war mentality. Those who consider themselves contemporary strategists take some responsibility for the continuing preponderance of bad strategy.

## Civil War Comes to the West 20

*David Betz*

The major threat to the security and prosperity of the West today emanates not from abroad but from its own dire social instability, structural and economic decline, cultural desiccation and elite incompetence which is leading to civil war. It is vital to understand the causes of this and to anticipate the likely conduct and strategic logic of the violent eruptions of civil conflict which loom on the West's horizon.

## Establishing the Realm of the Possible: Logistics and Military Strategy 28

*Jon Klug*

Military strategy and logistics have an interrelated, almost symbiotic relationship. This article contextualizes logistics in military theory, conveys its significance in military history through Anglo-American operations in World War II, and evaluates its current and future practice. It argues that for military strategy, logistics remains a means that circumscribes the ways and plays key roles in determining the time horizon to achieve the desired ends, as well as the level of risk.

## The Missing Strategic Theory Link in African Conflicts 36

*Jonathan R. Beloff*

This article questions why Strategic Theory is relatively absent in the study of African conflicts. Through the case study of Rwanda's Civil War, it argues that our understanding of these African conflicts is severely limited because of the absence of Strategic Theory.

## Should Strategists Worry About the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence? 43

*Vincent J. Carchidi*

This article explores an implicit philosophical assumption in strategy formation: that biological intelligence can be replicated, granting capabilities sufficient to justify a medium- and long-term strategic focus on artificial intelligence. It explains how an implicit and unstudied philosophy of AI often makes its way into force structure planning and national policy objectives across states.

# Co-Opting Clausewitz: Using *On War* to Explain Success and Failure in the War in Ukraine

*Hugh Smith - Australia*

*About the author*

Dr. Hugh Smith lectured and published in strategic thought, war and ethics, and armed forces and society at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy. He is the author of *On Clausewitz: A Study of Military and Political Ideas*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Published in 1832, re-published many times and translated into several languages, *On War* has been regarded by many as one of the greatest, if not the greatest book *On War* ever written.[i] Clausewitz's interpretation of war as a continuation of politics – and, indeed, of society – has seen him called a 'philosopher of war'.[ii]

**To cite this article:** Smith, Hugh, "Co-Opting Clausewitz: Using *On War* to Explain Success and Failure in the War in Ukraine," *Military Strategy Magazine*, Volume 9, Issue 1, Summer 2023, pages 4-8.

If this term is appropriate it is because he places war in its wider social and political context.[iii] But Clausewitz also provides concepts central to understanding the conduct of war. His theories of military strategy have received much attention, influencing many later theorists while also creating greater controversy.

Some political and military leaders have admired Clausewitz, believing that he offered an understanding of war that suited their purposes. In the years leading up to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, for example, the Prussian general Count von Moltke thought that *On War* advocated Napoleonic-style warfare with an emphasis on mass, morale, patriotism and leadership. Prussia, Moltke concluded, must wage war vigorously and seek total victory. [iv]

Others have condemned Clausewitz for promoting such militarism. In 1908 Colonel F.N. Maude's introduction to an English edition of *On War* declared that the spread of Clausewitz's ideas were responsible for 'the readiness for war of all European armies.[v] After WW I Captain Basil Liddell Hart echoed this view, depicting Clausewitz as 'the apostle of total war' and 'the ill-omened prophet of mass'. [vi] After the outbreak of WW II Liddell Hart declared that *On War* and its theory of unlimited war 'had gone far to wreck civilisation'.[vii]

Such extreme misrepresentations of Clausewitz did little to promote the understanding of war or the understanding of Clausewitz's analysis of war.[viii] Fortunately, failure to grasp Clausewitz's ideas has become less common and less influential in recent decades. This is partly because *On War* became more accessible to many scholars and military thinkers thanks to the Howard-Paret translation of 1976.[ix] Clausewitz has been paid serious academic attention and now boasts a long list of books and articles on his works as well as a scholarly website devoted to him.[x] War Colleges and military professionals now regularly salute him; academics and analysts frequently cite him.

## The question of relevance

Before considering how some of Clausewitz's ideas can be applied to the war in Ukraine, it is fair to ask whether ideas formulated around 200 years ago can be relevant to modern times. This is an issue Clausewitz himself recognised. His studies of earlier warfare almost totally excluded ancient and medieval campaigns because of their very different social, political and organisational circumstances. The absence of reliable sources was also a factor. [173-4] Clausewitz's numerous campaign histories thus go back only as far as 1660 while *On War* itself refers almost exclusively to campaigns and battles from the Seven Years War (1756-63) onwards.

Surely the advent of industrialised warfare, nuclear weapons, ICBMs, global communications, cyber threats, remotely controlled weapons platforms, chemical and biological weapons and so on has changed everything about war? The doctrine of mutual assured destruction during the Cold War, for example, required the two superpowers to leave themselves vulnerable to attack – a concept unthinkable to Clausewitz.[xi] The world, however, has not seen an end to wars that display the essential, characteristics that Clausewitz identified. The war in Ukraine is being fought by sovereign states over competing national interests; it is being conducted primarily by organised armed forces under military command and political direction; and it is killing people and destroying assets. *On War* does not appear completely outdated.

Interestingly, some of Clausewitz's own military histories bear on the question of relevance. In one such study he examines the campaigns conducted by Russia from bases in Ukraine (then part of Russia) against the Turks and Tatars in Crimea in the four summers from 1736 to 1739.[xii] *On War* mentions these campaigns briefly in a chapter entitled 'The Key to the Country' though mainly to debunk the idea that conquest of a particular stretch of territory will allow an attacker to dominate the defending country. [456-9] More relevant, as Alexander Burns points out, are Clausewitz's observations on Russia's conduct in these campaigns: Russia's political purpose lacked clarity, vacillating between conquest of Crimea and simply weakening it by devastating its territory; Russia was initially overconfident of success; Russian logistics were poorly organised; and Russia accepted very heavy casualties in return for minor territorial gains. Burns also notes that, while the campaigns were ineffective, Russia learned lessons that stood it in good stead in subsequent wars.[xiii]

The relevance of Clausewitzian analysis to the war in Ukraine will be considered in relation to two of Clausewitz's major strategic principles. The first is that defence is the stronger form of war, the second is that efforts need to be focused on an enemy's centre of gravity. Both appear particularly relevant to the war in Ukraine but there are traps into which analysts may fall, especially if they seek to explain success or failure. One pitfall is to assume that following Clausewitz's principles of strategy is a sure road to victory while failure to follow them leads to defeat. Another is the temptation to overlook the complexity and conditionality of Clausewitz's strategic thinking. Warnings against such pitfalls abound in *On War* but they are not always heeded.

## Defence is the stronger form of war

In examining the dynamic relationship between offence and defence in war Clausewitz weighs a wide range of factors. Some – for example, numbers and disposition of forces – are available to both attacker and defender but

others favour one side or the other. Thus he

argues at several points in *On War* that 'defense is a stronger form of fighting than the attack'. [84, 358, 380] He is not saying that defence will always triumph but that it possesses characteristics that make it more likely to prevail. By definition, defence has a passive aim – preservation – whereas offence has a positive goal, namely conquest. In short, it is simply 'easier to hold ground than take it'. [357-8] Factors more readily available to the defence include fortifications, shorter supply lines and national morale. A defending state is also more likely to win support from allies.

Only one factor, Clausewitz argues, distinctly favours the offence, namely surprise. But this can effectively be achieved primarily at the tactical level. The surprise initiation of a war is far more difficult. Given the extensive preparations involved, Clausewitz suggests, war 'will usually be announced in the press before a single shot is fired'. [210] Strategic surprise is highly valuable but usually requires 'major, obvious and exceptional mistakes on the enemy's part'. [364]

While friction troubles both defender and attacker there are dynamic factors that specifically burden the attack. First, as gains are made, they must be defended against counter-attacks. Resources must be devoted to defending these gains, often under less favourable conditions. Clausewitz describes the need to defend as the 'mortal disease' of the offence. [524] Second, the defending state may well be able to organise itself more effectively with shorter supply lines, use of militia forces and high morale. Third, the attacker loses momentum – thanks to factors such as casualties, supply problems, and delays caused by defensive strongpoints. Doubts in the political leadership may also arise or allies lose heart. [527, 567-9]

As a result, Clausewitz argues, there will be a 'culminating point' at which the burden becomes too great for the attack to carry. [528] A campaign must achieve its political purpose before reaching this point. Thus Napoleon, even though he had captured Moscow in 1812, fell victim to 'strategic consumption, and had to use the last strength of his sick body to drag himself out of the country'.[xiv]

In many cases, however, the attack will not be pushed as far as its culminating point. Strength and ambition fade; pause, delay, and indecision take their place. Surprise is more difficult to achieve because energy is lacking. Inevitably, too, a general will have difficulty in recognising when the culminating point is approaching or even when it has been reached. Consequently, Clausewitz argues, most generals prefer caution for fear of overshooting the mark. [573] Only major political objectives and strong military leadership will drive the attack onwards.

As the attack becomes progressively weaker, moreover, there is a point at which the defence can take the initiative. For Clausewitz this means defence will cut less 'sorry a figure when compared to attack' which in turn 'will no longer look so easy and infallible'. [371] It is when 'the flashing sword of vengeance' can be taken up and provide 'the greatest moment for the defence'. [370] Indeed, Clausewitz never regards defence as purely passive since even when awaiting an assault 'our bullets take the offensive', while 'a defensive campaign can be fought with offensive battles'. [524]

In putting forward the notion that defence is the stronger form of war Clausewitz is, of course, arguing in the abstract. He must assume there is no great disparity between the two sides in factors that may be critical to the success of otherwise of an attack. The number of troops, their morale and training, the deployment of forces, the achievement of strategic surprise, the strength of fortifications, the effectiveness of supply and logistics, popular support and the reactions of allies are all relevant to the actual outcome of a war. For the attack to triumph it must outperform its opponent in some or all of these dimensions. For the defence to succeed assets must be employed judiciously and energetically.

While Clausewitz implicitly and in places explicitly warns against expecting easy success in an attack, he does not present a case against aggression. The decision to initiate war is a matter for political leaders who must weigh expected benefits against uncertain risks. He does not condemn Napoleon for his disastrous invasion of Russia since this appeared the only possible way for France to avoid simultaneous wars against both East and West. [628] The furthest he goes is to describe Napoleon's campaign as in a political sense 'an extravaganza'. [325]

Ultimately it is a matter for politics – not for an analysis of war – to decide whether such great political risks and military efforts are justified. This is so even if they lead to national ruin. What he does caution is that political leaders should at least be clear about their objectives and understand the nature and possible consequences of any military action they undertake.

## Centre of Gravity

A second concept sometimes called upon by those examining the war in the Ukraine is Clausewitz's 'centre of gravity'. Often this is taken to be an opponent's capital city: capture Kyiv (or Moscow, or wherever) and surrender will follow. Alternatively, it may be taken to mean a point of weakness such as an enemy's communications, morale, or a gap in defences which should therefore be the principal target of the attack.

Clausewitz's analysis is more subtle. He borrows the term 'centre of gravity' [*Schwerpunkt*] from mechanics – the imagined point where all the forces of gravity bear on an

object, a point which if moved can throw that object off balance. For Clausewitz the centre of gravity in strategy is not the enemy's point of strength or weakness but his point of unity and cohesion. Especially where a war is fought to achieve a decisive result rather than a minor advantage, the centre of gravity is 'the most effective target for a blow'. [485-6]

Identifying the centre of gravity of an opponent in a particular conflict is 'a major act of strategic judgement'. [486] And it is all the more difficult given incomplete and perhaps inaccurate intelligence about the opponent and the inherent unpredictability of war. In the course of a war, moreover, the centre of gravity may change as hostilities impact on both belligerents and cause ambitions to change. Clausewitz suggests four candidates where an enemy's centre of gravity can be located: its territory, its capital city, its alliances and its army.

Territory is important because it holds people and resources which, once captured, are lost to the defending nation. But they do not add automatically to the strength of the conqueror since popular resistance may be provoked and harnessing the resources gained may require significant effort. In a major war, Clausewitz suggests, territory may not be that important. Occupation by the enemy may be only temporary such that territory is 'merely lent to him'. [488]

A capital city may seem the most obvious candidate for a centre of gravity. As Clausewitz observes, it is the centre of a nation's political activity and administration, and often represents its will to resist. But Napoleon's occupation of Moscow proved that a capital is not always decisive in ending a war.[xv] Putin's initial thrust toward Kyiv suggests his belief that Ukraine's capital was the centre of gravity and hence the key to success.

In some wars a nation's principal ally may serve as the centre of gravity so the ally's centre of gravity must be considered the focus of attack. The task is easier, Clausewitz argues, where there are several allies on which a state depends. For their unity depends on mutual political interests which may be 'precarious and imperfect' and on their cohesion in action which will 'usually be very loose, and often completely fictitious'. [486] The attacker, Clausewitz suggests, can exploit division among allies of the defender directly or chip away at their unity step by step. The war in Ukraine may prove an interesting test case.

The most common centre of gravity is the opponent's armed forces. In symbolic terms defeat of an enemy army is often more effective than occupying enemy territory or its capital. Napoleon's problem before Moscow was that his army was too weak to defeat the Russian army. [582] Occupation of the city had little effect on the course of the war. The loss of an army, by contrast, usually undermines an opponent's will to resist and exposes its people to occupation. Even so, in Clausewitz's view, military defeat may be countered by a resort to militia (reserve) or irregular forces which can offer a chance of successful defence. [479-83]

## Ukraine and strategic theory

That the war is a continuation of political intercourse with the addition of other means goes without saying. More complex is its relationship with strategic theory. For Clausewitz strategic theory is derived from a study of actual military history through a process he calls *Kritik* (critical analysis).[xvi] The result is initially an understanding of past wars – not necessarily of present or future wars. It is not 'a new technique' for waging war but provides 'a rationale for the actions of every general in history'. [486] When it comes to application to current or future wars Clausewitz is clear that strategic theory has limitations.

First, every war has its unique circumstances, even those wars that occur in the same era or locations, or among the same belligerents. Strategy is a matter of successive actions and reactions, many of them unpredictable, such that wars can take on more variations than a game of chess.

Second, success in war is not a matter of applying this or that strategic theory; nor will ignoring one or another theory inevitably result in failure. Strategic theory helps the general or statesman learn from the past and guides their decisions. It does not offer a sure recipe for success. For principles of strategy are applied during the course of a war when information is far from complete or reliable and when hindsight is unavailable. Military leaders will use their knowledge, experience and judgement, but must to some extent 'guess' how events will turn out. [572]

Generals are in essence gamblers. The best display of what Clausewitz calls military 'genius' – a combination of not simply knowledge and intellect but also strong character, quickness of perception (*coup d'oeil*), boldness and perseverance. [100-112] The height of genius is to grasp which principles of strategy are relevant in any given situation (and which can be ignored) and then to apply them effectively. And, one might add, to change strategies if events demand it.

Third, when concepts such as centres of gravity or defence as the stronger form of warfare are used, it is important to recognise their interdependence with the actual course of the war. President Putin, for example, may well have

ignored Clausewitz's 'advice' that defence is the stronger form of warfare by underestimating Ukrainian resistance and overestimating Russian strength. But no one could be sure in advance that such a misjudgement would be critical in the war.

Against a less popular leader than Zelensky and with better planning and logistics the first clash of arms might have led to the collapse of Ukrainian forces, the fall of Kyiv and Ukraine's acceptance of defeat. As Clausewitz recognises, it is important to estimate the enemy's strength and will to resist, but immediately adds that it cannot be known 'whether the first shock of battle will steel the enemy's resolve and stiffen his resistance, or whether, like a Bologna flask, it will shatter as soon as its surface is scratched'. [572]

In conclusion, it is important not to see success or failure in war as proof of the validity or invalidity of any given theory – evidence, perhaps, but not proof. Clausewitz's analysis of war is valuable in understanding the strategy – and to some extent the politics – of the war in Ukraine. But it is not a formula for winning wars – that requires the far more complex and difficult effort of bringing resources to bear on an opponent in accord with strategies judged to be relevant. Clausewitz wrote a brilliant analysis of strategy and its characteristics, not a handbook for waging wars.

## *References*

[i] See, for example, Bernard Brodie, 'On Clausewitz: A Passion for War', World Politics, vol. 75 no. 2 (January 1973).

[ii] W.B. Gallie, Philosophers of Peace and War: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978); Raymond Aron, Clausewitz: Philosopher of War, trans. C. Booker, N. Stone (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1983). See also Hugh Smith, 'Clausewitz as Sociologist', Infinity Journal, Special Edition, Clausewitz and Contemporary Conflict (February 2012). https://www.infinityjournal.com/article/47/Clausewitz_as_Sociologist/

[iii] Hugh Smith, On Clausewitz: A Study of Military and Political Ideas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) passim.

[iv] Brian Bond, The Pursuit of Victory (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1998) 78.

[v] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. J.J. Graham (London: Kegan Paul, new rev ed. 1940) ix.

[vi] Brian Bond, Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought (London: Cassell, 1977) 37-8, 80-81.

[vii] Basil Liddell Hart, Strategy: The Indirect Approach (London: Faber & Faber, 3rd rev. ed. 1954) 357.

[viii] On interpretations of Clausewitz in the English-speaking world see Christopher Bassford, Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America 1815-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[ix] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. and edited by Michael Howard & Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Subsequent citations are from this edition with page numbers in square brackets.

[x] https://www.clausewitzstudies.org There is also a more broadly focused website https://www.clausewitz.com

[xi] Smith, On Clausewitz, 244-8.

[xii] Entitled 'Krieg der Russen gegen die Türken von 1736–1739' the study is short (12 pages) and not yet translated into English. Accessed at https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=p55DAAAAcAAJ&pg=GBS.PA16&num=19

[xiii] Alexander S. Burns, 'Clausewitz's Analysis Resonates to this Day', The National Interest, 1 March 2023.

[xiv] Carl von Clausewitz, The Campaign of 1812 in Russia (London: 1843; reprinted by Academic International, Hattiesburg, 1970), 166.

[xv] Clausewitz refers to Moscow as the effective capital of Russia while recognising St Petersburg, the formal capital, as a 'second capital'. This duality complicated Russia's defensive strategy. [622]

[xvi] On War, Book II, ch. 5; on the relationship between theory and practice in Clausewitz's thinking see Smith, On Clausewitz, chs 14,15.

# SUBSCRIBE FOR FREE

**Subscribe to our newsletter to recieve notifications about new editions and articles. Only available online.**

Exclusively online at **MilitaryStrategyMagazine.com**

Our website features the following:

- Fully open, no registration required
- A full archive of all Infinity Journal editions, special editions and articles
- Online and downloadable versions of all editions, past, present and future
- Email notifications for new editions
- MSM Briefs - Informative and educational pieces to provide understanding of core concepts
- An enhanced digital edition that provides the best reading experience and features. Fully compatible with iOS, iPadOS & Android.
- Submission Guidelines and much more

**No paid subscriptions or logins, just content. It really is that simple.**

# The Roots of Bad Strategy

*M.L.R. Smith - Australian War College*

Jarrod Morris - https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1724178, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40184101

*About the author*

M.L.R. Smith is Academic Principal of the Australian War College, Canberra. Formerly he was Head of the Department of War Studies, King's College, University of London.

Over the previous three decades of teaching strategic theory, I have inquired of many a tutorial group as to what should be considered 'good strategy'. From the outset the students proceed to tick off numerous markers of good strategy: the ability to achieve goals; attaining values and outcomes that are meaningful; maximising interests; accomplishing aims as efficiently as possible; evaluating the costs and benefits of different courses of action; balancing risk and reward; gaining an appreciation of the adversary; assessing one's own strengths and limitations; arriving at an outcome better than where one began; knowing when to stop.

There is no obvious way of distilling these level-headed observations except to infer that the essence of good strategy is premised upon the principle of proportionality. This begs the question: what is proportionality? Proportionality, my students deduce, connotes weighing up the balance of advantages relative to disadvantages; gauging the value of one's goals and the price one might be willing to pay to achieve them; the willingness to modify, change or abandon certain aims or behaviours if one is not getting what one wants through a chosen course of action.

Acting with prudence might also be another way of describing the principle of proportionality. A prudential attitude is not a recipe for inaction. Neither does it mean that one cannot take risks. It does suggest, however, that those risks are calculated, are not undertaken rashly but are sufficiently thought through. They are also premised on the preparedness to ask searching questions about why and

**To cite this article:** Smith, M.L.R., "The Roots of Bad Strategy," *Military Strategy Magazine*, Volume 9, Issue 1, summer 2023, pages 10-18.

with what intent one is embarking on a course of action, and crucially, is it likely to be worth it?

## Framing the argument

The point is that if 20-year-old undergraduates can comprehend the precepts of effective strategy, why cannot higher decision makers and policy analysts, who seem – at least in the context of contemporary Western practice – to exhibit poor judgment time and again? Yes, it may be tiresome to rehearse the litany of recent failures in military intervention, but do we not fail as strategic analysts if we don't at least ask the question *why*?

This article, then, seeks to discern whether we – and by 'we' I mean those of us who operate in the intellectual space where policy and strategy intersect, be it in academia, think-tanks, government, and armed forces – can initiate a serious debate as to how and why systematic errors of judgement have arisen. Can we, in other words, get to the roots of what constitutes bad strategy?

Although I usually try to avoid discursive forms of writing, I would like to narrate the argument here partly through my own engagement with this question over the past three decades, to show how I have arrived at my observations about where the roots of bad strategy may be said to originate. On that score, I hope the reader will be patient, and bear with me as I endeavour to establish the premises of my argument.

By bad strategy, I mean the formation and execution of policies that manifestly do not obtain their original goals. In building an argument about the roots of bad strategy, I am conscious that I will be skating over questions that cannot be dealt with adequately in the space of a short article: such as whether meaningful distinctions between policy and strategy can be made, or whether political failures can be distinguished from strategic failures, or for that matter, just who are the strategists?

With respect to these questions, while there is no 'guild' of strategists as such,[i] I have intimated that there does exist an interface between policy makers, armed forces practitioners, along with analysts and commentators in policy think-tanks and the scholarly world, who do aspire to have – and in some cases have had and continue to have – an influence over how national policy and strategy are moulded, as will be shown. The ultimate point that this article thus attempts to convey is that those who may be said to comprise the strategic fraternity, howsoever defined, should not evade their responsibility for the formation of bad strategy.

## Good judgement… a commodity in short supply?

Approaching matters prudentially – asking the questions about what one is seeking to achieve at proportional cost – is no guarantee of future success but it is one of the tenets that underpins the notion of 'good judgement': a mixture of sound reasoning and appreciation of context, along with an intuitive grasp of what constitutes a sensibly pragmatic response to the circumstances in which one finds oneself. This, again, may be the most approximate way that one can capture this most elusive of attributes.

The practice of good judgement – good strategy – is a classic case of easier said than done. Deciding on a preferable course of action must often be made in conditions of uncertainty, sometimes in the presence of a wilful adversary who is seeking to assert its interests against your own.[ii] All manner of circumstances mitigates against the exercise of good judgement – time constraints, pressure to act, lack of resources, lack of knowledge: all those elements that the Prussian soldier-scholar of war, Carl von Clausewitz, argued comprise 'fog and friction' that made the simplest of things in strategy difficult.[iii]

All of this may be true, and obvious. But why, my students wonder, has the evidence of good judgement – the willingness to act with due consideration to potential costs and consequences – been so notably lacking in contemporary Western politics? They have a point. It is a question that I have increasingly pondered. Those of us who write about what constitutes 'good strategy', and who have sought to teach its principles to generations of undergraduates, post-graduates and working professionals in public service do not have much to be proud of judging by the lack of success our efforts seem to have produced.

## The roll call of failure

A register of Western strategic failure in the current era is hard to ignore. A pattern of sustained error has been demonstrated particularly, though not exclusively, in the realms of foreign policy. The low point was the humiliating end of the twenty-year military commitment in Afghanistan, concluding in the chaotic withdrawal of Western forces in the summer of 2021.[iv] Afghanistan was merely the culmination of a series of setbacks and miscalculations, which includes the by now familiar roll call of Iraq, Libya, and Syria – amongst others – where Western interventions manifestly failed to fulfil their original policy aims at proportionate cost.[v]

These calamities succeeded only in eroding Western power and prestige, collapsing functioning – if imperfect – systems of governance, causing widespread regional instability, while inflicting enormous human suffering. The

proximate reason for these tragedies is often laid at the door of a reckless advocacy of regime change and military intervention after 2001. Rhetorically this advocacy intended to pre-empt threats to Western security after 9/11 by striking at bases that supposedly incubated jihadist conspiracies. By almost any metric, the consequences were not better than the conditions that preceded them.[vi]

More controversially still, the impetus behind these misadventures derived from an ideologically driven belief that externally induced regime change would enable countries to re-make themselves along more liberal democratic lines.[vii] Through such a process, the thinking went, societies and regions would bring themselves into alignment with a liberal international order that would be congenial to Western, and specifically U.S., interests. In the words of one its leading exponents, Charles Krauthammer, the U.S. should 'lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of world order and being prepared to enforce them'.[viii]

## Discounting geopolitics?

That these grand strategic programmes did not play out as their architects hoped, underlines a broader critique of Western foreign and military policy, which maintains that for the better part of two-decades geopolitical realities have been neglected in favour of ethicist based abstractions that wish to fashion the world on the basis of what 'ought' to be, rather than what 'is'.[ix] Ideas like the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine that, in theory, legitimises military intervention in the internal affairs of states in times of extreme crisis, or the belief that admitting China into the World Trade Organization in 2002 would moderate the People's Republic's hegemonic ambitions and inculcate it into the norms of good regional citizenship, are taken as symbols of this misplaced idealism.[x]

As far back as the 2010s critical appraisals emerged from seasoned foreign policy watchers lamenting a decline in the rigour of Western strategic formulation. Such commentary opined that Western nations were 'distracted [and] weak', susceptible to being outmanoeuvred on the world stage by the likes of Russia and China, who pursued their national interests unencumbered by notions that geopolitics was somehow 'old-fashioned and unappealing'.[xi] Writing in 2014, Charles Powell, former foreign policy adviser to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, complained that a 'false doctrine of soft power' and 'creeping legalism' made it increasingly 'hard to galvanise democratic societies to meet new threats'.[xii]

The systematic malfunctions in foreign and military policy speaks to a paradox. It is in those countries that constitute the generic West, most notably the Anglophone countries of the United States and the United Kingdom, where a reflective practice of strategic thought is explicitly cultivated, be it in institutes and think tanks, university departments and courses, books, and academic journals. Much of this intellectual endeavour is directed towards identifying national security priorities, evaluating the 'lessons' of history, and the pre-conditions for policy implementation.[xiii] In other words, the precepts of good strategic practice. Yet, it is from within this socio-intellectual milieu, and the broader national polities whence they originate, that has yielded so many examples of recent strategic failure.

## Strategic humility

All this can become personally embarrassing. For several years I have given lectures to Oman's National Defence College on the principles of strategic thought. In the past two years, I have felt the need to acknowledge that perhaps my value in standing before these mid/senior level military officers is as a representative of a general construct that has in recent decades been responsible for the production of so much flawed strategy. Images of decimated cityscapes across the Middle East or the anarchic sight of U.S. military transport aircraft departing from Kabul surrounded by crowds of civilians, are sufficient to make the point. I wonder why they would want to listen to me, or indeed any other know-it-all flown in from one of the prestige centres of strategic learning in the West to preach at them about the theories of 'good strategy'?

An acknowledgement of Western strategic deficiency does, though, strike a chord with my Omani audience. They see the results of Western foreign policy mistakes all around them, but – I sense – are receptive to someone prepared to concede that there are systemic defects, and that Western based 'experts' do not have all the answers. Humility, I have come to understand, is perhaps the one unimpeachable component of 'good strategy'.

Nevertheless, the self-recognition that I do not occupy a position of Olympian detachment on the matters of good strategic practice, usually provides a stimulus for excellent discussions about why Western strategic policy has proved so deficient. Such discussions provide the gateway into a subject that is, to my mind, not nearly discussed enough in the circles that debate strategy: namely, that while much time is dedicated to detailing the rules of 'good strategy', little time is dedicated to identifying the roots of *bad strategy*.

## The problem is proportionality not actionability

Works like Richard Rumelt's, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy*, have sought to describe the contours of bad strategy. Good strategy, according to Rumelt, is the concentration of resources and focus towards resolving the 'crux' of specific problems.[xiv] Bad strategies, on the other hand, are nebulous aspirational statements that define no actionable objectives.[xv] Though Rumelt's observations contain much

relevance for non-state organisations, be they businesses or bureaucracies, they have less specificity for policy and strategy at the national level where the theoretical signifiers of bad strategy are less evident. After all, the failures of contemporary Western strategy are rarely because they were devoid of actionable goals. The problem is not that they have lacked action. It is that they have lacked *proportion*.

The question is why do Western nations seem to have a problem with taking actions at proportional cost? Historical reflection suggests that prudential calculations of how to advance national goals were in previous eras put at far more of a premium. A case in point was the way Britain managed the growth of its empire. That a small maritime nation for nearly 150 years succeeded in controlling a third of the world's land surface, often with fewer administrators than a large city council, indicates a high level of strategic management, which balanced resources with perceived needs in multiple theatres.[xvi] When the era of decolonisation dawned, moreover, the calculation became one of withdrawing from empire at minimum cost and on the best possible terms with new post-imperial governments.[xvii]

All this is not to argue that policy makers in the past were not susceptible to miscalculations and that foreign and strategic policies have since the end of the Cold War been everywhere wrong or futile. The Coalition effort to eject Iraq from Kuwait in 1990/91 was a model demonstration of how to wage a contained conflict for specific goals. While the utility of Western strategy in the Balkans in the mid/late 1990s – in Bosnia and Kosovo – can be debated, the cumulative impact of NATO-led military actions was to steer these conflicts towards a conclusion. British intervention to deal with the civil war in Sierra Leone in 2000 is generally rated a success.[xviii]

## The rise of anti-strategy: a case of serial repeat-offending

Even so, it is hard to deny that much has gone awry, certainly in Anglo-American strategic planning, both in concept and execution since 2001. To reiterate, the problem is the inability to relate to problems proportionately, with a propensity to get drawn into wars of extended duration, or else attempting ill-thought through acts of regime change.[xix] Lest anyone think that this is an exaggeration, or that it is somehow a bit unfair to blame policy failures on 'strategists' who are entirely innocent of the foolish decisions of politicians, let us reflect upon the advocacy of those in the academic and policy analysis sphere who, regardless of whether they would choose to describe themselves as *strategists*, nevertheless have clearly aspired to have an influence upon U.S. *strategy*.

In a 'Letter to President Clinton on Iraq' of 26 January 1998, various luminaries representing the Project for a New American Century including Francis Fukuyama, Paula Dobriansky, William Kristol, Robert Kagan, William Schneider, amongst others – every one of them highly credentialled members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, armed with Ivy League degrees, ensconced in prestigious Washington think-tanks, or sinecures at renowned universities – urged the President to 'enunciate a new strategy that would secure the interests of the U.S. and our friends and allies around the world. That strategy should aim above all at the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power'. They continued: 'The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing'. The signatories went onto state that they were 'fully aware of the dangers and difficulties' but if the President acted decisively, he would be 'acting in the most fundamental national security interests of the country'.[xx]

The explicit rejection of the principles of prudence and proportionality in this advocacy were laid out even more glaringly in a January 2002 paper for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, by Robert Kagan and William Kristol, which lambasted those 'who argued for limiting American involvement overseas, for avoiding the use of ground troops, for using force in a limited way and only as a last resort, for steering clear of nation-building, for exit strategies and burden-sharing – those who prided themselves on their prudence and realism'. 'If we fail to address the grave threat we know exist', the authors intoned, 'what will we tell the families of future victims? That they were "prudent"?'[xxi]

One trusts that these quotations above speak for themselves and require no elaboration in terms of their strategic nescience.[xxii] They illustrate how an almost anti-strategy way of thinking is embedded in sections – and influential sections at that – of the Western foreign policy establishment.[xxiii] There are many levels of explanation that might account for this particular pathology of Western strategic failure,[xxiv] but for the purposes of igniting a debate, let me posit the following hypothesis: *the roots of bad strategy over the past two decades resides in the continuing influence of a total war mentality*.

## The distorting influence of total war

Total war – the idea that all national efforts should be galvanised towards titanic struggles for survival – resonates in the Western consciousness as the path to victory in both world wars:[xxv] the prevailing side being the one most able to comprehensively mobilise society towards collective goals, bear the costs, and wear down the other side to exhaustion.[xxvi] The total war mindset was one that transferred easily into the Cold War era, with the ideological clash between the Soviet and U.S.-led alliance blocs: a clash

that was to yield a clear victor with the collapse of the USSR in 1990/91. However, it is the enduring sense that totalising solutions should be applied to problems which this study contends is responsible for much strategic failure.

Notions of total war frame a Manichean view of victory and defeat, which undermines prudential reasoning in favour of expansive objectives, which are often conceived in terms of a stark morality of good versus evil. The persistence of moral dichotomies into the post-Cold War era informed the U.S. Administration's 'war on terror' and 'Axis of evil' rhetoric after 9/11, which legitimised the targeting of states of concern for possible military intervention.[xxvii] More generally, the prolongation of a total war mentality can be observed in how a warlike idiom permeated public and policy discourse after 1945 in relation to non-warlike phenomena, be it the 'war on drugs', the 'war on poverty', the 'war on cancer', and the 'war on alcoholism'.[xxviii]

Recently this tendency was evidenced by the 'war on covid'. The *British Medical Journal* noted how speech around Covid-19 was flooded with biomilitary metaphors about patients being 'struck with illness', and where physicians 'were the warriors deployed to the front lines'.[xxix] The rhetoric of winning the fight against the pandemic was widely applied in the media and government.[xxx] The totalising implications of this outlook were manifest in the practical responses to the Covid-19 era that saw governments assume vast powers to direct national efforts towards 'beating the virus' – closing schools and businesses, restricting human contact, enforcing social-distancing, mandating masks and vaccines, and making it difficult, if not quasi-illegal, for anyone to question the efficacy of these measures.[xxxi]

The influence of total war thinking during this era was not latent, but clearly articulated. Writing in late 2020, one U.S. analyst, for example, stated that 'Clausewitz would almost certainly endorse a national COVID-19 strategy and war effort in which the government executes its powers to compel the entire nation state into a uniform response and ensure that all resources are concentrated in the pursuit of fighting the same kind of war as everyone else'.[xxxii] Such sentiments are not dissimilar from those offered by the progenitors of total war thinking, like Erich Ludendorff's, overtly anti-Clausewitzian, 1935 tract *Der Totale Krieg*. [xxxiii]

Leaving aside the question as to whether it is plausible to speak of divining Clausewitz's response to Covid-19 from beyond the grave, let alone whether applying militarised language to non-violent medical or social challenges represents a coherent understanding of war, the rhetoric of total war places the notion of proportionality and prudence at a discount. It is a lens through which socio-political problems, no matter how limited or potentially containable, determines that they must be met with an overwhelming response.

## The totalising mind

And this goes to the root of what often constitutes bad strategy. A totalising mind is usually an ideologically fixated one. While a fixated mind can articulate a focal point for action, it is one that is often inflexible, and unwilling to concede that it might be wrong. The price to be paid for proving its error, moreover, is inordinately high. It is a mindset that takes over fifty thousand combat deaths and $141 billion to affirm that trying to prevent a corrupt state like South Vietnam from falling to the communists in the North was not worth the effort.[xxxiv]

It is an outlook that must witness years of insurgency against occupying forces and the infliction of a devastating sectarian civil war on a country, the *de facto* control of which was later handed over to Iran, to show that invading Iraq was futile, especially when no weapons of mass destruction could be found and when *the people* made it clear they were none too enamoured with being 'liberated'.[xxxv] It is a mentality that can only be convinced of the follies of nation-building in a country like Afghanistan after the vast wastage of human and material resources expended over a twenty-year period.[xxxvi]

For that matter, it is also a state of mind that is prepared to tolerate enormous expenditure – trillions of dollars – along with numerous other social harms, imposed with the intention of halting the spread of a virus, all to achieve an outcome which studies suggest may only have reduced mortality rates by 0.2 percent.[xxxvii] Contrary to the strategic clairvoyants who invoked Clausewitz's name to 'endorse a unified, nationally directed response to COVID-19, because it more effectively concentrates force and promotes shared understanding of the objectives of the war',[xxxviii] one authoritative study by Johns Hopkins University concluded that lockdowns 'are ill-founded and should be rejected out of hand as a pandemic policy instrument'.[xxxix]

All of which is to say that these examples illustrate that lack of proportion, excessive and inordinately costly responses, seem baked into Western policy formation, often because they are cast in terms of an essential 'investment' in national security.[xl] Poor strategic choices are not simply the product of a few unfortunate miscalculations. This is a record of serial repeat offending. The question, which rarely seems to get asked, is *why?* What is the cause of this enduring strategic recidivism? The provisional answer this argument has advanced is that it is the preponderant influence of total war thinking. But can one get any further beyond this observation?

## Totalisation and the people

Totalising responses may be cogent in times of supreme emergency where national survival is placed in jeopardy.

When the stakes are this high, as they were for many states in World War II, much of the populace is likely to see – or be persuaded of – the necessity for large-scale sacrifices. They are likely also to accept the need for unrestricted objectives such as the policy of unconditional surrender, which demanded the invasion, occupation and – in the case of Germany – dismemberment of adversaries as the requirement for victory.

People, in other words, discern the response as proportionate to the threat being confronted. It is, though, the tendency towards applying the prism of total war to threats and situations that cannot be said to endanger the physical survival of nations that represents the most pernicious aspect of strategic thinking, or what passes for strategic thinking, in the post-total war era. How to explain this curious feature of current day Western strategic responses?

One way to approach an answer is to appreciate that the total wars of the twentieth century were manifestations of wars of the people: they involved the mobilisation of entire populations against one another.[xli] To sustain this level of commitment over time required wide popular support. A shared fate and the desire to defend a particular national way of life were prerequisites for total war to exist as a coherent idea. It is the popular consensus for action that enables total wars to be prosecuted.

The question is, then, what happens in the absence of totalising causes? In 1998, after the end of the last total struggle – the Cold War – the philosopher Anthony Giddens proclaimed that the nations of the West were 'without enemies' and the prospects for large-scale inter-state war unlikely.[xlii] Rather than heralding a period of *laissez faire* peace, where individual states could be left to their own devices, those like Giddens envisaged a new grand strategic project where 'it was no longer utopian to connect issues of national and global governance'.[xliii] A 'liberal imperialist posture' aiming to impose a democratic 'rules' based global order was to replace the era of superpower struggle.[xliv]

## Unlimited aims in an age of non-total threats

The total war predisposition is one that is underpinned by a comprehensive ideological agenda. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the continuation of a total war mentality revealed itself in the perpetuation of an all-encompassing liberal teleology: an idealistic cause to create a 'New World Order'. This appealed to many Western political elites at the 'end of history'.[xlv] A single, overarching strategic narrative thus displaced more sceptical and prudential appreciations of the national interest, in favour of military interventions based on the espousal of cosmopolitan normative values.

The strategic problem here is that totalising ideologies cannot maintain coherence without the 'total' support of the population. The sacrifices demanded to uphold a liberal international order, be it interventions to displace 'rogue' regimes in the Middle East or to maintain Western support of Ukraine against Russia, are – in the absence of direct threats to national survival – unlikely to garner the full support of the populace, who proceed to question the wisdom of throwing human and material resources at problems that do not yield clear and realisable objectives. Totalising liberal aspirations that aim to 'defend democracy' or ensure 'social justice' begin to outrun the willingness of people to support imprecise, open-ended goals. Sections of the populace come to question the proportionality of the response and the domestic consensus for the strategy breaks down.

We have seen this pattern play out time and again in Western policy. The issue is already presaging a faultline in U.S. politics over the Russia-Ukraine war, with Republicans likely to contest the next presidential election in 2024 on the cost of aiding Ukraine and whether U.S. national interests are being served. By contrast President Joe Biden's foreign policy team invoke a Wilsonian/Manichean worldview where democracy is pitched against autocracy, and freedom vs. tyranny.[xlvi] The latter line is promoted by many governments, political parties, and mainstream media outlets in the West often with little reflection. In this manner, grand strategy – a potentially useful term to describe the effort to unify national focus and resources – is stretched and manipulated in pursuit of totalistic progressive abstractions like human rights, global justice, and increasingly climate change and environmental sustainability, in a way that leaves students of prudential diplomacy and statecraft bemused, and a great deal of the public alienated.[xlvii]

## Conclusion: the real roots of rotten strategy?

Not nearly enough attention, this study maintains, is devoted to discovering the causes of defective strategy. Dissecting how poor judgement, disproportionate responses, and a lack of prudential reasoning arises might enable better choices to be made in the future.

A totalising liberal idealism promoted in an age of non-total threats is therefore one level of explanation that accounts for the poor strategic outcomes witnessed in recent times. When populations do not perceive themselves to be in mortal danger or at war with opposing ideas or nations, they are unlikely to accept the trade-offs and long-term commitments demanded of them by others who inhabit a neo-total war mindset. The outstanding question is why policymaking has become substantially detached from popular consent, and continues to perpetuate a total war way of thinking?

There are many possible layers of explanation here regarding the social forces pushing Western societies

towards a post-democratic age,[xlviii] where new elites seek to exclude the popular voice,[xlix] but one notable result has been to confine strategic matters within a technique of specialist advocacy that is often dismissive of popular sentiments, because they are seen as unsophisticated and out of step with expansive liberal cosmopolitan norms.[l] It is this technocratic coterie who credentialise themselves as experts in grand strategy and appoint themselves as arbiters of what they consider effective policy making.

We arrive, then, at something of a paradox. It is as if good strategy – if the past three decades is anything to go by – exists in inverse proportion to the number of students and centres of learning dedicated to studying strategy. Seemingly, the greater the highbrow effort devoted to expostulating about grand strategy the worse the outcomes.

In the final analysis we are left to wrestle with the most ironic of questions, which is are *we* part of the problem? Are we who traffic in the currency of strategic learning, responsible for promoting an almost gnostic idea that strategy is a form of secret knowledge, available only to a few select initiates and certainly beyond the reach of the common person to apprehend,[li] whose views should, naturally, be excluded from any consideration?

Are we, who pretend to the knowledge of what constitutes good strategy, the real harbingers of bad strategy?

## *References*

[i] M.L.R. Smith, 'On efficacy: A beginners guide to strategic theory', Military Strategy Magazine, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 10–17.

[ii] See Lawrence Freedman, 'The master strategist is still a myth', War on the Rocks, 14 October 2014, https://warontherocks.com/2014/10/the-master-strategist-is-still-a-myth/.

[iii] Carl von Clausewitz, On War (trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 119–121.

[iv] Graeme Herd, 'The causes and the consequences of strategic failure in Afghanistan?' George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 21 August 2021, https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/causes-and-consequences-strategic-failure-afghanistan-0.

[v] Michael Clarke, 'Afghanistan and the UK's illusion of strategy', RUSI Commentary, 16 August 2021, https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/afghanistan-and-uks-illusion-strategy.

[vi] See Anthony H. Cordesman, America's Failed Strategy in the Middle East: Losing Iraq and the Gulf (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020), pp. 1–14.

[vii] Benjamin Denison, 'The more things change, the more they stay the same: The failure of regime change', Policy Analysis, No. 883, Cato Institute, Washington, DC, January 6, 2020; Sam Meyerson, 'How to fail at regime change', Harvard Political Review, 22 January 2020, https://harvardpolitics.com/regime-change-failure/.

[viii] Charles Krauthammer, 'The unipolar moment', Foreign Affairs, Vol. 70, No. 1 (1990–91), p. 33.

[ix] David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith, 'History restarted: The return of the Machiavellian moment', War on the Rocks, 23 September 2015, https://warontherocks.com/2015/09/history-restarted-the-return-of-the-machiavellian-moment/.

[x] Mina Al-Oraibi, '"Responsibility to Protect" is just one more casualty of the Syrian war', Foreign Policy, 14 June 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/14/syria-war-un-security-council-responsibility-to-protect-r2p-humanitarian-intervention-assad-russia-human-rights-civilians/; Faisal Islam, 'How the west invited China to eat its lunch', BBC News, 10 December 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/business-59610019.

[xi] Edward Lucas, 'Ukraine protests: we're letting Putin win', Daily Telegraph, 20 February 2014.

[xii] Charles Powell, 'The West will pay for losing its backbone in Iraq and Ukraine', Daily Telegraph, 19 June 2014.

[xiii] See Linda Robinson, Paul. D Miller, John Gordon IV, Jeffrey Decker, Michael Schwille and Raphael S. Cohen, Lessons From 13 Years of War Point to a Better U.S. Strategy (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation 2014).

[xiv] Richard P. Rumelt, The Crux: How Leaders Become Strategists (London: Profile, 2022).

[xv] Richard P. Rumelt, Good Strategy/Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters (London: Profile. 2011).

[xvi] See Lawrence James, The Rise and Fall of the British Empire (Boston: Little Brown, 1997).

[xvii] See John Darwin, The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System, 1830-1970 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[xviii] Andrew Dorman, Blair's Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone (London: Routledge, 2009).

[xix] A. Trevor Thrall and Eric Goepner, 'Step back: Lessons for US foreign policy of the failed war on terror', Policy Analysis, Cato Institute, No. 814, 26 June 2017, https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/step-back-lessons-us-foreign-policy-failed-war-terror.

[xx] Eliott Abrams, et al, 'Letter to President Clinton on Iraq', 26 January 1998, Project for a New American Century. See '1998 Letter on Iraq', New York Times, 3 December 2001, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/03/world/1998-letter-on-iraq.html.

[xxi] Robert Kagan and William Kristol, 'What to do about Iraq?' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21 January 2002 (reprinted from The Weekly Standard, 21 January 2002).

[xxii] These quotations also demonstrate that strategic failures cannot be ascribed simply to the idea that U.S. interventions lose the run of themselves, beginning with limited strategic intent and then involuntarily ending up in crusades to transform the target society into a version of America. The evidence cited here shows that the elements of a messianic mission to re-cast societies and regions are prior assumptions ingrained in these advocacies.

[xxiii] See James Wirtz, 'Fooling all the people some of the time', Review of John M. Schuessler, Deceit on the Road to War: Presidents, Politics and American Democracy, International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2018), pp. 843-847.

[xxiv] Here we might note, among other things, the influence of commercial interests in fuelling foreign military adventures, but also in particular, the lack of penalties for analytical failure. Analysts have not suffered any injury to their careers for predictive ineptitude or reckless advocacy in recent years and in many cases, they continue to prosper in their sinecures or advance further through the corridors of power. The correlation is therefore obvious, if no sanction attaches to lack of aptitude, then repeated incompetence is the logical outcome.

[xxv] See Peter Calvocorressi and Guy Wint, Total War: The Story of World War II (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

[xxvi] William Philpott, 'Total war', in Matthew Hughes and William Philpott (eds.), Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2006), pp. 131-152.

[xxvii] David Frum, 'The enduring lessons from the "Axis of Evil" speech', The Atlantic, 29 January 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/axis-of-evil-speech-frum-bush/621397/.

[xxviii] 'War on drugs: Unites States history', Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/war-on-drugs; 'War on poverty: United States history, Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/War-on-Poverty; 'The "war on cancer "isn't yet won', Nature, 19 January 2022, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00109-3; 'Pharmacists declare war on alcoholism month', National Today, 13 June 2023, https://nationaltoday.com/pharmacists-declare-war-on-alcoholism-month/.

[xxix] Katherine A.A. Clark, S. Elissa Altin, 'Calling time on the use of war metaphors in covid-19', BMJ, No. 377, 13 May 2022, https://www.bmj.com/content/377/bmj.01214.

[xxx] Poonam Khetrapal Singh, 'Together, forward in the fight against COVID-19', World Health Organisation, 10 May 2020, https://www.who.int/southeastasia/news/opinion-editorials/detail/together-forward-in-the-fight-against-covid-19; Sam Baker and Andrew Whetherspoon, 'America is finally winning its fight against the coronavirus', Axios, 13 May 2021, https://www.axios.com/2021/05/13/coronavirus-cases-deaths-good-news-pandemic.

[xxxi] Kevin Rawlinson, 'This enemy can be deadly: Boris Johnson invokes war time language', The Guardian, 18 March 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/enemy-deadly-boris-johnson-invokes-wartime-language-coronavirus.

[xxxii] Jordan Beauregard, 'Covid-19 and Clausewtiz (Masters of War Part 2)', Wavell Room, 15 October 2020, https://wavellroom.com/2020/10/15/covid-19-and-clausewitz-masters-of-war-part-2/.

[xxxiii] Erich Ludendorff, Der Totale Krieg (Munich: Ludendorffs Verlag, 1935).

[xxxiv] 'US spent $141-billion in Vietnam in 14 years', New York Times, 1 May 1975.

[xxxv] Ron Suskind, 'Faith, certainty and the presidency of George W. Bush', New York Times Magazine, 17 October 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/faith-certainty-and-the-presidency-of-george-w-bush.html.

[xxxvi] Kori Schake, Jim Mattis, Jim Ellis, and Joe Felter, 'Defence in depth: Why U.S. security depends on alliances—now more than ever', Foreign Affairs, Vol. 99, No. 6 (November/December 2020), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-11-23/defense-depth.

[xxxvii] James Herby, Lars Jonung and Steve H. Hanke, 'A literature review and meta-analysis of the effects of lockdowns on covid-19 mortality', Studies in Applied Economics (Johns Hopkins Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health and the Study of Business Enterprise), No. 200, January 2022.

[xxxviii] Beauregard, 'Covid-19 and Clausewitz (Masters of War Part 2)'.

[xxxix] Herby, Jonung and Hanke, 'A literature review and meta-analysis of the effects of lockdowns on covid-19 mortality', p. 43.

[xl] Schake, Mattis, Ellis, and Felter, 'Defence in depth'.

[xli] Kate Clements, Paul Cornish, Vikki Hawkins, Margaret Macmillan, Total War: A People's History (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2021).

[xlii] Anthony Giddens, The Third Way: The Renewal of Democracy (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), p. 140.

[xliii] Ibid., p. 140.

[xliv] John J. Mearsheimer, 'Imperial by design', National Interest, No. 111 (January-February 2011), p. 19.

[xlv] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Free Press, 1992).

[xlvi] Walter Russell Mead, 'The cost of Biden's "democracy" fixation', Wall Street Journal, 3 April 2023, https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-cost-of-bidens-democracy-fixation-autocracy-summit-freedom-house-ideology-foreign-policy-middle-east-86638fc5.

[xlvii] Charlotte Hume, 'Grand strategy in an age of climate change: A theory of emergent grand strategy', The Strategy Bridge, 29 September 2019; https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/9/29/grand-strategy-in-the-age-of-climate-change-a-theory-of-emergent-grand-strategy; Laura Leddy, 'A grand strategy for the climate', American Security Project, 20 October 2019; https://www.americansecurityproject.org/a-grand-strategy-for-the-climate/; Elizabeth G. Boulton, 'Plan E: A grand strategy for the twenty-first era of entangled security and hyperthreats', Journal of Military Studies, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2022), pp. 92-128.

[xlviii] Peter Mair, Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy (London: Verso, 2013).

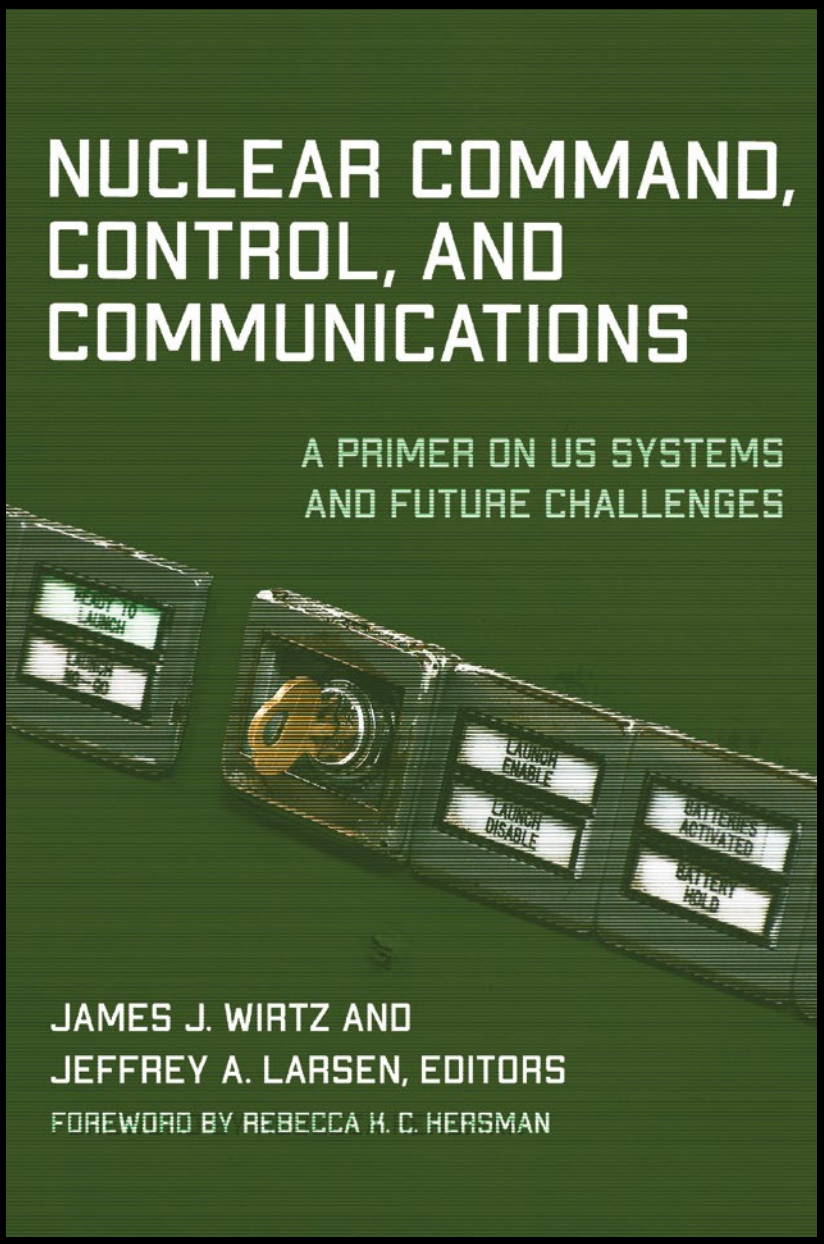
[xlix] Matthew Goodwin, Values, Voice and Virtue: The New British Politics (London: Penguin, 2023).

[l] Thomas Sowell, The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

[li] See for example, William Kristol, 'Surge's success going unnoticed', CBS News, 19 March 2007, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/surges-success-going-unnoticed/.

“As **James Wirtz** and **Jeffrey Larsen** demonstrate in this excellent and urgently needed edited collection, threats to the safe and secure management of US nuclear weapons are as acute today as ever. Only by acting now to understand and mitigate the new challenges facing the US nuclear arsenal can we hope to avoid nuclear accidents, dangerous escalation, and future nuclear crises.”

—**Andrew Futter**,
*professor of international politics, University of Leicester*




Hardcover 9781647122430 $119.95

# Civil War Comes to the West

*David Betz - King's College London, Department of War Studies*




*About the author*

David Betz is Professor of War in the Modern World in the Department of War Studies, King's College London where he heads the MA War Studies programme. He is also a Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute. His most recent book, *The Guarded Age: Fortification in the 21st Century*, is published by Polity (October 2023).

> Europe is a garden. We have built a garden. Everything works. It is the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that the humankind has been able to build—the three things together … Most of the rest of the world is a jungle…[i]

So said EU Foreign Affairs chief Josep Borrell in Bruges in October 2022. Future dictionaries will use it as an example of the definition of hubris.

This is the first of two essays. It deals with the reasons why civil war is likely to dominate the military and strategic affairs of the West in the coming years, contrary to the typical expectations of the future war literature, and generally the strategic logic which shall underpin such wars. The next essay will address specifically the actions and strategies which existing military forces might pursue before and during these conflicts.

That is because the major threat to the security and prosperity of the West today emanates from its own dire social instability, structural and economic decline, cultural desiccation and, in my view, elite pusillanimity. Some academics have begun to sound the alarm, notably Barbara Walter's *How Civil Wars Start—and How to Stop Them*, which is concerned primarily with the dwindling domestic stability of the United States.[ii] To judge from President

**To cite this article:** Betz, David, "Civil War Comes to the West," *Military Strategy Magazine*, Volume 9, Issue 1, summer 2023, pages 20-26.

Biden's September 2022 speech in which he declared 'MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our republic' governments are beginning to take heed, albeit cautiously and awkwardly.[iii]

The field of strategic studies, however, is largely silent on the issue, which is strange because it ought to be something of concern. Why is it correct to perceive the increasing danger of violent internal conflict erupting in the West? What are the strategies and tactics likely to be employed in the civil wars to come in the West and by whom? These are the questions which I shall address in this essay.

## Causes

The literature on civil wars is united on two points. Firstly, they are not a concern of states that are rich and, secondly, nations which possess governmental stability are largely free of the phenomenon. There are degrees of equivocation on how much regime type matters, though most agree that securely-perceived-to-be-legitimate democracies and strong autocracies are stable. In the former, people do not rebel because they trust the political system works justly overall. In the latter, they do not because authorities identify and punish dissenters before they have a chance.

Factionalisation is another main concern, but extremely heterogeneous societies are not more prone to civil war than very homogenous ones. This is put down to the high 'coordination costs' between communities that exist in the former, which mitigate against the formation of mass movements. The most unstable are moderately homogenous societies, particularly when there is a perceived change in the status of a titular majority, or significant minority, which possesses the wherewithal to revolt on its own. By contrast, in societies comprised of many small minorities 'divide and conquer' can be an effective mechanism of controlling a population.[iv]

In my view, there is no good reason to fault the main thrust of extant theory on civil war causation as described above. The question, rather, is whether the assumption of the conditions which have traditionally placed Western nations outside the frame of analysis of people concerned with large-scale and persistent eruptions of violent civil discord are still valid.

The evidence strongly suggests that they are not. Indeed, as far back as the end of the Cold War some perceived that the culture which 'won' that conflict was itself beginning to fragment and degenerate. In 1991, Arthur Schlesinger argued in *The Disuniting of America* that the 'cult of ethnicity' increasingly endangered the unity of that society.[v] This was prescient.

Consider the striking findings of the *Edelman Trust Barometer* over the last twenty years. 'Distrust', it concluded recently, 'is now society's default emotion.'[vi] The situation in America, as shown in related research is acutely bad. As of 2019, even before the contested Biden election and the Covid-epidemic, 68 per cent of Americans agreed it was urgently necessary to repair levels of 'confidence' in society in government, with half averring that a 'cultural sickness' is what fading trust represented.[vii]

In sociological terms, what this collapse of trust reflects is a plunge in the stock of 'social capital', which is both a kind of 'superglue', a factor of societal cohesion, as well as a 'lubricant' that allows otherwise disparate groups in society to get along.[viii] That it is in decline is disputed by no one, and neither is anyone seriously unclear on the unhappy consequences.

There is dispute over its causation, however. Chancellor Angela Merkel once pointed the finger directly at multiculturalism, declaring that in Germany it had 'utterly failed', an idea that was echoed six months later by then Prime Minister David Cameron in Britain. He elaborated that 'It ghettoises people into minority and majority groups with no common identity.'[ix] Such statements by leaders, both noteworthy centrists, of large, ostensibly politically stable, Western states cannot easily be dismissed as populist demagoguery.[x]

Additionally, 'political polarisation' has been enhanced by social media and identity politics, on which more below. Digital connectivity tends to drive societies towards greater depth and frequency of feelings of isolation in more tightly drawn affinity groups. Each of these is guarded by so-called 'filter bubbles', carefully constructed membranes of ideological disbelief that are constantly reinforced by active and passive curation of media consumption.[xi]

What might be described as 'intertribal conflict' is by no means confined to the virtual spaces of the Internet; rather, it manifests also in physical fighting in a self-reinforcing feedback cycle. Many examples of this from recent headlines might be given. A good one though, is the city of Leicester in Britain, which over the last year has witnessed recurring violence between the local Hindu and Muslim populations, both sides animated by intercommunal tensions in distant south Asia. A Hindu mob marched through the Muslim part of town chanting 'Death to Pakistan'.[xii]

What this reflects above all is the considerable irrelevance of Britishness as an aspect of the pre-political loyalty of significant fraction of two of the largest minorities in Britain. Who wants to fight whom and over what? The answer in this case to this good strategic question has very little to do with the nominal nationality of the people who have observably already begun to fight.

Finally, to this volatile social mix must be added the economic dimension, which can only be described as extremely worrisome. By common estimation, the West has

already started another economic downturn, a long overdue recurrence of the 2008 financial crisis, combined with the fallout of the deindustrialisation of Western economies, a notable by-product of which is the progressive de-dollarisation of global trade that has been turbocharged by sanctions on Russia, which has also induced a ballistic rise in the costs of basic goods such as energy, food, and housing.[xiii]

In terms of economic financialization, debt issuance, and consumption, the West has reached the end of the line, which means that a gigantic gap in expectation of well-being is opening. If there is one other thing that the literature on revolution agrees upon it is that expectation gaps are dangerous.[xiv] Again, simply put, a time-honoured means of controlling the rise of incipient mobs is the provision by the ruling powers of 'bread and circuses', in other words basic consumption and cheap entertainment—the efficacy of both of which is rapidly attenuating in the present day.

To conclude this section, it can be said that a generation ago all Western countries could still be described as to a large degree cohesive nations, each with a greater or lesser sense of common identity and heritage. By contrast, all now are incohesive political entities, jigsaw puzzles of competing identity-based tribes, living in large part in virtually segregated 'communities' competing over diminishing societal resources increasingly obviously and violently. Moreover, their economies are mired in a structural malaise leading, inevitably in the view of several knowledgeable observers to systemic collapse.[xv]

## Conduct

The intimacy of civil war, its political intensity, and its fundamentally social quality, plus the acute accessibility to attack on all sides of everyone's weak points can make them particularly savage and miasmic. The Russian Civil War which followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 is a particularly good example. It is a form of war in which people suffer raw cruelty and fanaticism not for what they have done but for what they are.[xvi]

Perhaps civil wars in the West can be contained to the level of loathsomeness of those of Central America of the 1970s and 1980s. In which case 'normal' life will remain possible for the fraction of the population that is rich enough to insulate itself from the larger milieu of political assassinations, death squads and intercommunal reprisals, plus thriving criminal predation which typify a society in the process of tearing itself apart.[xvii]

The trouble is that the urge to fight, indeed the wish to *accelerate* towards conflict, is not confined to just one group—as one might gather from the recent alarm over far-Right populism—but is of a rather more general character, with radicalism increasingly visible in all sorts of communities.[xviii] Consider, for instance, the following lines from a French leftist tract published in 2007:

> It's well known that the streets teem with incivilities. The technical infrastructure of the metropolis is vulnerable… Its flows amount to more than the transportation of people and commodities. Information and energy circulate via wire networks, fibres and channels, and these can be attacked. In our time of utter decadence, the only thing imposing about temples is the dismal truth that *they are already ruins*. [xix]

At this point in the history of conflict, it hardly seems necessary to explain the techniques of taking existing social divisions in society and tearing them into chasms because they have been widely studied.[xx] The defence establishments of the West are very familiar with such matters as they have presented themselves in the varied foreign theatres in which they have been embroiled as part of the so-called War on Terror.

Is it a complete wonder that those lessons and ideas should have found their way back home? The *Citizen's Guide to Fifth Generation Warfare* co-written by MGEN Michael Flynn, former head of the Defence Intelligence Agency and President Trump's initial National Security Advisor, is a well-designed handbook and explicit in its aim, which is to educate people in the West about revolt. In his own words, he wrote it because 'I never dreamed the greatest battles to be waged would be right here in our homeland against subversive elements of our own government.'[xxi]

Over the last thirty years the West has preoccupied itself thanklessly in an expeditionary capacity in the invertebrate civil wars of others. It ought to have learned that it is impossible to maintain an integrated multi-valent society once neighbours start kidnapping each other's children and murdering them with hand drills, blowing up each other's cultural events, slaying each other's teachers and religious leaders, and tearing down their icons. It is soberingly worth noting, moreover, that plenty of instances of all those things have occurred already in the West and *all* of them have occurred in France alone in the last five years.[xxii]

Scenarios, mostly focused on the United States, of what civil wars in the West would look like exist in the literature.[xxiii] They tend to share one thing in common particularly, which is the expectation as expressed by Peter Mansoor, professor of military history at Ohio State University, that they will,

> …not be like the first [American] civil war, with armies manoeuvring on the battlefield [but] would very much be a free-for-all, neighbour-on-neighbour, based on beliefs and skin colour and religion. And it would be horrific.[xxiv]

Approximately 75 per cent of post-Cold War civil conflicts

have been fought by ethnic factions.[xxv] Therefore, that civil war in the West will be likewise is unexceptional. The nature of the *belief* that Mansoor invokes as being important is, however, worth dwelling upon. I would suggest that the belief in question is the acceptance by *all* groups in society of the precepts of 'identity politics'.

Identity politics may be defined as politics in which people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger political group. It is overtly post-national. It is this above all that makes civil conflict in the West not merely likely but practically inevitable, in my view.

The peculiarity of contemporary Western multiculturalism, relative to examples of other heterogenous societies, is threefold. Firstly, it is in the 'sweet spot' with respect to theories of civil war causation, specifically the supposed problem of coordination costs is diminished in a situation where White majorities (trending rapidly toward large minority status in some cases) live alongside multiple smaller minorities.

Secondly, thus far what has been practiced is a sort of 'asymmetric multiculturalism' in which in-group preference, ethnic pride, and group solidarity—notably in voting—are acceptable for all groups except Whites for whom such things are considered to represent supremacist attitudes that are anathematic to social order.

Thirdly, because of the above what has emerged is a perception that the status quo is invidiously unbalanced, which provides an argument for revolt on the part of the White majority (or large minority) that is rooted in stirring language of justice. From a strategic communications perspective, a morally inflected narrative which has a clearly articulated grievance, a plausible and urgent remedy, and a receptive conscience community is powerful.[xxvi]

'Great Replacement' theory is an expression of this narrative.[xxvii] 'Downgrading' is the term by which it is described in civil war theory. It refers to the perception of a dominant group that what is occurring to them is,

> …a situation of status reversal, not just political defeat. Dominant groups go from a situation where, one moment, they get to decide whose language is spoken, whose laws are enforced, and whose culture is revered, to a situation where they do not.[xxviii]

For the present analysis what is important here, beyond the resonance of the narrative of 'downgrading' clearly observable in how widely it has propagated, is another peculiarity of multiculturalism in the West, which is that it is also *geographically* asymmetric.[xxix] There is a distinctively observable urban-rural dimension to immigrant settlement patterns: basically, the cities are radically more heterogenous than the countryside. Thus, logically, we may conclude that civil wars in the West that burn across ethnic cleavages will have a distinctively rural vs. urban character.

## Strategic Logic

Go back a few pages to the French leftist tract which I cited earlier and observe its main premise: the streets *already* teem with incivilities—the cities are *already* ruins, or more precisely they are currently configured so precariously that all it takes is a little push to accomplish their destruction. In a nutshell, that is the strategic logic evinced openly by anti-status quo groups today of all political stripes. They intend to precipitate the collapse of the heterogenous major cities causing cascading crises leading to systemic failure and a period of mass chaos that they hope to wait out from the relative security of the relatively homogenous rural provinces.

Although the premise sounds simple, its underlying logic accords with the conclusions of some impeccable authorities. For instance, consider this passage from a 1974 booklet on *The Limits of the City*:

> Either the limits imposed on the city by modern social life will be overcome, or forms of city life may arise that are congruent with the barbarism in store for humanity if people of this age should fail to resolve their social problems. The evidence for this tendency can be seen not only in the metropolis, choking with an alienated and atomized aggregate of human beings, but in the 'well-policed' totalitarian city composed of starved black ghettoes and privileged white enclaves—a city that would be a cemetery of freedom, culture, and the human spirit.[xxx]

Its author, an American Jewish social theorist, Trotskyist, influential urbanist, and ecologist, cannot be called a man of the far-Right—though his identification of the problems of society as being atomization and degeneracy (a fair way to describe what he called 'cultural desiccation') are both far-Right tropes.

Much of the very large literature on the issue of urban vulnerability is couched in terms of the resilience of 'critical infrastructure' to external attack, or disaster, and to some extent terrorism.[xxxi] The fact of the matter, though, is that the most critical vulnerability of infrastructure is to domestic attack, against which it is unguarded (and likely un-guardable). *Normally functioning* societies have no need of such defences, which is to say that a lot of comfortable assumptions ride on those two words.

In Britain, for example, there are 24 gas compression stations, all in semi-rural environs, two of which serve London. None are hidden or more guarded than any

normal light industrial facility. Attacking one requires no more than being able to plough through a chain link fence. Likewise, the network of Major Accident Hazard Pipelines (MAHPs—the clue is in the name), is intrinsically vulnerable.[xxxii] In July 2004 in Ghislengien, Belgium, when one was accidentally damaged by construction work 25 people were killed and 150 seriously injured.[xxxiii]

One could say much the same of the major elements of the electrical grid—high-tension pylons, transformer stations, and so on—and just as well the communications network—routing facilities, cell and microwave towers, fibre optic cable nodes, and the like. As for transport infrastructure, much of which is severely run down even without active efforts to disrupt it, many major cities—New York being a prime example—are accessed via bridge or tunnel which constitute known bottlenecks that are easily attacked.[xxxiv]

Disruption of any of these systems would have knock-on effects on the supply of food and medicine, which is tenuous under normal conditions. The fact is that the average modern urbanite has on hand no more than a few days of food and the cities they live in possess typically no more than a few days more food supply in warehouses and on store shelves. Britain's food supply chain, for instance, is described as resilient and complex but is also dependent on just-in-time networks that are highly vulnerable to disruption.[xxxv]

In summation of this section, we may observe that the civil wars for which the West is in store will be demarcated along ethnic lines, which on account of the relative distribution of population groups strongly suggests that they will have a distinctive rural vs. urban character. Its strategic logic will be to cause the destruction of metropolitan centres through infrastructural attacks with a view to causing cascading systemic failure leading to uncontrollable civil disorder generating further rapid decline. The tactics employed are plausible on account of the tenuous stability of modern cities at the best of times, a fact observed by reputable scholars that incipient revolutionaries have simply recognised.

## Conclusion

Recognition of the possibility of civil war in the West exists in politics and related punditry and in a range of scholarship. Many people still deny or are reluctant to talk of it. Perhaps they fear a kind of 'security dilemma' that might occur; if people become convinced that civil war is coming because important people say so they might behave in ways that cause or hasten it. Equally, one might surmise, some know the truth but are factionally invested in the conflict and are simply positioning over who will be judged by history to have fired the first shot in it.

Neither, in my view, are credible positions to hold when confronted with the unfortunate reality. Theory is generally clear and convincing about the conditions under which civil war is likely to occur. Walton concluded that in any year just under four per cent of the countries in which the conditions of civil war were present would experience it.[xxxvi] Accepting this, even as something of a pessimistic baseline, would suggest over the coming decade the collective West is in deep trouble. Moreover, there is little reason to hope that should one kick off in one major country its consequences would not spread more widely to others.

Moreover, it is not simply that the conditions are present in the West; it is, rather, that the conditions are nearing the ideal. The relative wealth, social stability and related lack of demographic factionalism, plus the perception of the ability of normal politics to solve problems that once made the West seem immune to civil war are now no longer valid. In fact, in each of these categories the direction of pull is *towards* civil conflict. Increasingly, people perceive this to be the case and their levels of confidence in government would seem to be declining even more in the face of the apparent unwillingness or inability of leaders to confront the situation honestly.

The result, society-wise, is a reinforcing spiral calling to mind the opening lines of Yeats' famous 'The Second Coming'.

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold…

The fact of the matter is that the tools of revolt in the form of various appurtenances of modern life are just lying around, knowledge of how to employ them is widespread, targets are obvious and undefended, and more and more formerly regular citizens seem minded to take the shot.

## *References*

[i] European Diplomatic Academy, Opening remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the inauguration of the pilot programme (Bruges: 13 October 2022), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration_en

[ii] Barbara Walter, How Civil Wars Start—and How to Stop Them (London: Penguin, 2022).

[iii] See 'Remarks by President Biden on the Continued Battle for the Soul of the Nation', The White House (1 September 2022), https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/09/01/remarks-by-president-bidenon-the-continued-battle-for-the-soul-of-the-nation/

[iv] The introductory material in Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'On Economic Causes of Civil War', Oxford Economic Papers, Vol. 50, No. 4 (October 1998), pp. 563–573 and Volker Krause and Susumu Suzuki, 'Causes of Civil War in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparison', Social Science Quarterly, Vol. 86, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 160–177, provide a good summation of the state of the field. Also Eok Leong Swee, 'Economics of Civil war', Australian Economic Review, Vol. 49, No. 1 (March 2016), pp. 105–111.

[v] Arthur Schlesinger, The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society (New York: Whittle Books, 1991).

[vi] Richard Edelman, 'Breaking the Vicious Cycle of Distrust', Edelman Trust Barometer (2022), https://www.edelman.com/trust/2022-trust-barometer/breaking-vicious-cycle-distrust

[vii] Lee Rainie et al, 'Trust in America', Pew Research Centre (22 July 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/trust-and-distrust-in-america/

[viii] Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

[ix] See Matthew Weaver, 'Angela Merkel: German multiculturalism has "utterly failed"', Guardian (17 October 2010), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed and Jamie Doward, 'David Cameron's Attack on Multiculturalism Divides the Coalition', Guardian (6 February 2011), https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/feb/05/david-cameron-attack-multiculturalism-coalition

[x] It bears noting also that Putnam's later research on diversity also points in this direction. See, Robert Putnam, 'E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture', Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2007), pp. 137–174.

[xi] These dynamics are discussed in Alicia Wanless and Michael Buerk, 'Participatory Propaganda', in David Herbert and Stefan Fisher-Hoyrem (eds.), Social Media and Social Order (Warsaw: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 111–132.

[xii] Jessica Murray, Aina J Khan and Rajeev Syal, '"It Feels Like People Want to Fight": How Communal Unrest Flared in Leicester', Guardian (23 September 2022), https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/23/how-communal-unrest-flared-leicester-muslim-hindu-tensions

[xiii] This is particularly convincingly argued by Ray Dalio, Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order: Why Nations Succeed or Fail (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021). Additional insightful commentary specifically on the dire financial outlook of the United States is Alastair Walton, 'The Elephant in the Room: The US Fiscal Deficit & Debt Outlook Over the Next 30 Years' (Australian National University: College of Business and Economics, 10 September 2019).

[xiv] See the classic exchange between James Chowning Davies 'The J-Curve and Power Struggle Theories of Collective Violence', pp. 607-610 and David Snyder and Charles Tilly 'On Debating and Falsifying Theories of Collective Violence' in American Sociological Review, Vol. 39, No. 4 (August 1974), pp. 610–613.

[xv] On which point see Peter Turchin, End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites and the Path of Political Disintegration (London: Penguin, 2023) as well as Miguel Centeno et al (eds), How Worlds Collapse (New York: Routledge, 2023), esp. chap. 1 'Globalisation and Fragility: A Systems Approach to Collapse'.

[xvi] See Bruce Lincoln, Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War (New York: De Capo Press, 1999), p. 44.

[xvii] Albeit written from the perspective of American intervention in said conflicts, Todd Greentree's Crossroads of Intervention (Westport, CT: Praeger 2008), provides a thorough descriptive account of 1980s Central America.

[xviii] A good example of concern over far-Right radicalism is Marek N. Posard, Leslie Adrienne Payne, and Laura L. Miller, Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2021).

[xix] The Invisible Committee, The Coming Insurrection (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2009), pp. 111-112.

[xx] David Kilcullen's Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Guerrilla (London: Hurst, 2013), stands out amongst a wide literature on the topic.

[xxi] Michael Flynn and Boone Cutler, The Citizen's Guide to Fifth Generation Warfare (no publication place given: Resilient Patriot LLC, 2022), Appendix 1 (unpaginated). Lest it be thought that such informed and sincere radicalism is simply a far-Right issue, readers are directed to Leftist revolutionary handbooks and texts such as William Powell's The Anarchist Cookbook (Syracuse NJ: Barricade Books, 1971) and Carlos Marighela's, Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla (1969), available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marighella-carlos/1969/06/minimanual-urban-guerrilla/ amongst others, have been around for decades.

[xxii] For a sobering look at the long-term trajectory for France which puts into context more recent attacks, see Andrew Hussey, The French Intifada: The Long War Between France and its Arabs ((New York: Faber and Faber, 2014).

[xxiii] Among the most well-developed is Stephen Marche's The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2022).

[xxiv] Quoted in Marche, p. 2.

[xxv] James Fearon and David Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War', American Political Science Review, Vol. 97, No. 1 (February 2003), pp. 75-90.

[xxvi] On the structure of effective strategic narratives, see David Betz and Vaughn Phillips, 'Putting the Strategy Back into Strategic Communications', Defence Strategic Communications, Vol. 3 (Autumn 2017), pp. 50-51.

[xxvii] Renaud Camus, You Will not Replace Us! (Paris: Self-published, 2018).

[xxviii] Walton, Civil Wars, p. 65.

[xxix] For examples of this narrative resonance see David Abbott, Dark Albion: A Requiem for the English (Kindle: 2013), Jim Goad, Whiteness: The Original Sin (Kindle: 2018), and Douglas Murray, The War on the West (London: HarperCollins, 2022), amongst others.

[xxx] Murray Bookchin, The Limits of the City (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), pp. 2-3.

[xxxi] See Jon Coaffee, Security, Resilience, and Planning (London: Lund Humphries, 2020).

[xxxii] See Phil Shea, 'Mapping Major Accident Hazard Pipelines for Land Use Planning Decision Making', UK Onshore Pipeline Operators' Association (undated), https://www.ukopa.co.uk/mapping-major-accident-hazard-pipelines-for-land-use-planning-decision-making/

[xxxiii] See 'Ghislengien Pipeline Explosion 2004', Process, Safety, Integrity (undated), https://processsafetyintegrity.com/events/2004-07-30_ghislenghien/

[xxxiv] See James McBride and Anshu Siripurapu, 'The State of US Infrastructure', Backgrounder: Council on Foreign Relations (8 November 2021), https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/state-us-infrastructure

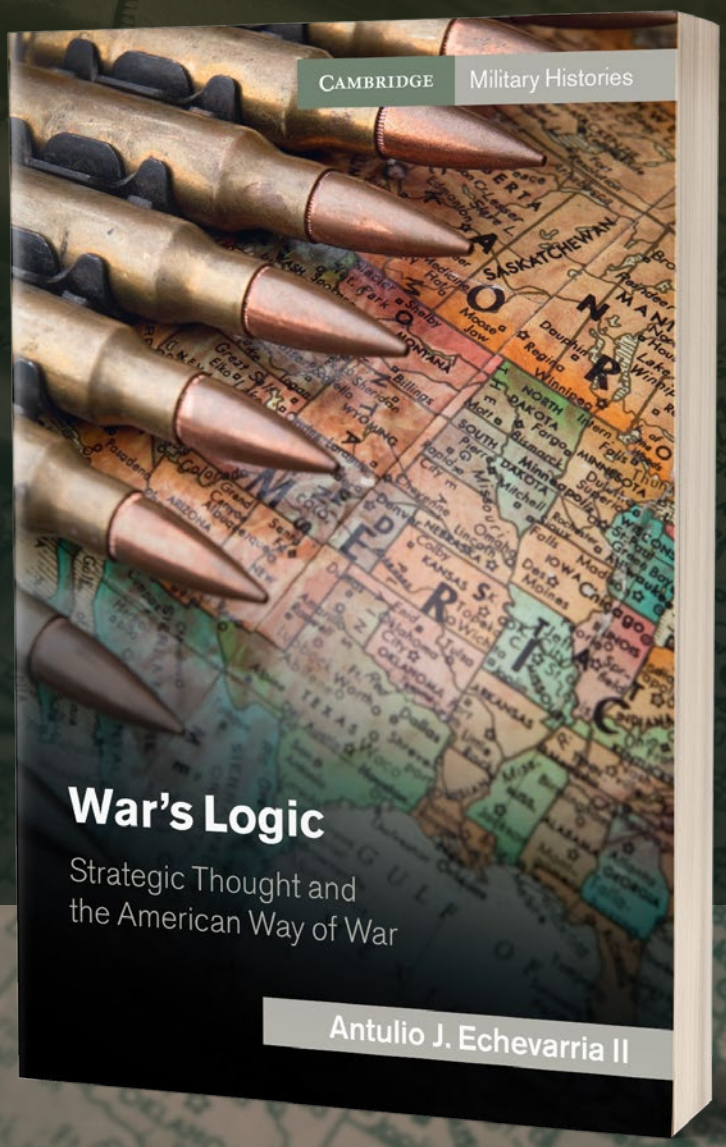
[xxxv] UK Food Security Report 2021 (London: Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, December 2021), p. 152.

[xxxvi] Walton, Civil Wars, p. 198.

# War's Logic

## Strategic Thought and the American Way of War

**Antulio J. Echevarria II**




**30% discount to MSM readers**

"An articulate, penetrating, refreshing, intellectually satisfying, unvarnished and well researched treatise that captures, through compelling, essential biographies, the evolving American Way of War. A fabulous and engaging book."

**Patricia M. Shields,** Editor-in-Chief of Armed Forces & Society

**Buy your copy at 30% discount here:**
**www.cambridge.org/WarsLogicMSM**

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Establishing the Realm of the Possible: Logistics and Military Strategy

*Jon Klug - U.S. Army*

by Chief Photographer Robert F. Sargent - National Archives and Records Administration, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17040973

*About the author*

Jon Klug is a U.S. Army Colonel and Assistant Professor at the U.S. Army War College. He is a veteran of multiple deployments, an experienced staff officer in several American and NATO higher headquarters, and an award-winning instructor at the Air Force Academy, the Naval Academy, and the Army War College. Jon is a Ph.D. candidate in Military History at the University of New Brunswick, Canada.

In a recent speaking engagement, retired Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek related, "In any kind of operation, there are two things you must get right…you have got to have your command and control in place, and you have got to have a robust, reliable logistics system."[i] This quotation is consistent with the axiom, "Amateurs discuss tactics, professionals discuss logistics." Despite old military wisdom, logistics often gets short shrift in professional publications outside those specifically focused on the subject. Royal Marine Major General

**To cite this article:** Klug, Jon, "Establishing the Realm of the Possible: Logistics and Military Strategy," *Military Strategy Magazine*, Volume 9, Issue 1, summer, 2023, pages 28-34.

Julian Thompson summed up this reality well in his book *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict in 1991* with two insights. He wrote, "I have no reason to believe that logistics will ever have much military sex-appeal, except to serious soldiers, but this book is written in the hope I am wrong."[ii] Thompson added, "For as experience of war recedes, so, with the passing of time, logistics tend to take a back seat to the more glamorous tactics and strategy."[iii] While written in 1991, these comments remain accurate, raising the question: How does logistics relate to military strategy today? For military strategy, logistics remains a means that circumscribes the ways and plays key roles in determining the time horizon to achieve the desired ends, as well as the level of risk.

To prove this assertion and demonstrate that the study of logistics deserves a more prominent position in the study of military strategy, this article contextualizes logistics in military theory, conveys its significance in military history through Anglo-American operations in World War II, and evaluates its current and future practice.

## Theory: Military Strategy and Logistics

Exploring the question of how logistics relates to military strategy today requires an exploration of related theory. There are two essential definitions. Historians credit military theorist Antoine-Henri de Jomini with coining the term "logistics" in his 1838 work *The Art of War*. He maintained: "Logistics comprises the means and arrangements which work out the plans of strategy and tactics."[iv] The meticulous Jomini discussed logistics using no less than eighteen "principal points," detailing multiple logistical functions that dealt with the movement and supply of military forces.[v] The second definition is "military strategy." While there are many potential definitions, Colin Gray's is apt: "The direction and use made of force and the threat of force for the purposes of policy as decided by politics."[vi] These two definitions are the basis for the existing theory for logistics and military strategy.

There are several important theoretical works that deserve consideration—books on overarching military theory that also discuss logistics, such as Jomini or *On War* by Carl von Clausewitz, and a few books focused specifically on logistics, such as George Thorpe's *Pure Logistics* and Henry Eccles' *Logistics in the National Defense*.[vii] Starting with the great Prussian, Clausewitz observed, "Of the items wholly unconnected with engagements, serving only to maintain the forces, supply is the one which most directly affects the fighting. It takes place almost every day and affects every individual. Thus it thoroughly permeates the strategic aspects of all military action."[viii]

Where Clausewitz and Jomini included logistics as part of their larger military theory, there are two essential works specifically on logistics. First is George Thorpe's 1917 *Pure Logistics*. Early in his book, Thorpe used an excellent metaphor worth repeating:

Strategy is to war what the plot is to the play; Tactics is represented by the role of the players; Logistics furnishes the stage management, accessories, and maintenance. The audience, thrilled by the action of the play and the art of the performers, overlooks all the cleverly hidden details of the stage management.[ix]

Thorpe also directly discusses the two theorists and their views on the relationship between strategy, tactics, and logistics, providing insight into how logistics permeates strategy and tactics. As a clear indicator of how Thorpe's core ideas have withstood the test of time, the introduction of the 1986 National Defense University edition observed, "No new Jomini or Thorpe has emerged to offer a modern theory of logistics Jomini and Thorpe's theoretical work remains."[x]

Henry Eccles followed Thorpe and incorporated the experience of the world wars. Eccles gave guest lectures to war college students and wrote prolifically, earning the title of the "Grand Old Man of Logistics."[xi] In 1959 he compiled his extensive papers and lectures into the book *Logistics in the National Defense*, a comprehensive examination of logistics from the national level, including a detailed discussion of military strategy and logistics.[xii] Eccles's chapter titled "Strategic-Logistic-Tactical Relations" argued that "the scope and timing of strategic plans are both governed by logistic capabilities…the converse whereby the composition, the balance, and the deployment of forces and the rate of their build up all are determined by a complex interrelation of strategic, logistic and tactical considerations."[xiii] Thus, Clausewitz, Jomini, Thorpe, and Eccles agree logistics permeates military strategy and tactics.

## Historical Practice: WWII Anglo-American Global Military Strategy and Logistics

Although military history is replete with potential examples of how logistics affect military strategy, the Anglo-American experience in World War II provides a perfect example of the relationship between logistics and military strategy. First and foremost, shipping drove military strategy and logistics. The British had to mobilize and adjust to wartime realities, and their industrial and shipping situation meant that British military strategy was focused on the strategic defensive. The Battle of the Atlantic, the longest campaign of the war, threatened the import lifeline in multiple ways, such as shipping shortages, ship sinkings, and delays inherent to shifting to western ports because of Luftwaffe attacks on the eastern ports. The decision to reinforce the Middle East and Greece added to an already difficult shipping and logistic situation, creating a major import crisis.[xiv] Meanwhile, American domestic political

sentiment kept the US from being much help until the Lend Lease Act of March 1941. It would take time before American industry could build enough ships to meet demand.

As the strategic situation deteriorated in Europe and war clouds gathered in the Pacific over Imperial Japan, the American and British planners began to explore potential global strategy in late January 1941 in secret meetings known as American British Conversations. The consensus was to focus on Germany and prioritize support for the British.[xv] After Pearl Harbor, the Western Allies began a series of wartime conferences to set global coalition and military strategies for each theater. The First Washington Conference codenamed Arcadia occurred in late December 1941 and early January 1942. It confirmed the previously discussed strategy of "Germany First," building an alliance structure—led by Prime Minister Churchill, President Roosevelt, and the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS)—and prioritizing the various theaters of war, including logistical issues such as shipping and munitions. [xvi]

Shipping would dominate Allied strategy making, proving critical in determining the feasibility of global military and theater strategies. The Second Washington Conference (no codename) occurred in June 1942. The Americans wanted to open a second front in France to aid the Soviet Union, which was wildly premature and the British knew it. Instead of this direct and untimely approach, Churchill suggested attacking North Africa. This would also help secure the Mediterranean and obviate the longer shipping transit around Africa. While this operation, codenamed Torch, made sense from a strategic perspective (and American political perspective), it was terrible due to shipping and logistical overreach. This error was coupled with another strategic-logistical overreach in the Pacific, as America's first offensive campaign was to secure the strategic lines of communication to Australia by seizing the Island of Guadalcanal. This campaign was often derisively called "Operation Shoestring" due to inadequate logistical support and lasted six months. The collective global logistical challenges created shortages, slowing operations and thereby extending the campaigns. Thus, North Africa and Guadalcanal each accepted significant logistical risks—therefore operational and tactical risks—when conducted simultaneously, courting strategic disaster.

Shipping and logistics improved as the Allied industrial situation advanced and the Battle of the Atlantic began to turn in the Allies' favor. At the Casablanca Conference (codenamed Symbol) on January 14-24, 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt made several key decisions, including the policy of unconditional surrender, the invasions of Sicily and Italy, the conduct of the Combined Bomber Offensive, and island hopping in the Pacific theaters. The following major Allied conferences—the Third Washington Conference (Trident) in May and the First Quebec Conference (Quadrant) in August—discussed the forces, material, and timing of Overlord, and shipping and the resultant logistical buildup for the invasion were the foundation of these discussions.

While the Allies were able to mount more offensive operations in 1943, shipping, logistics, and the availability of LSTs (Land Ship, Tanks, essential for amphibious landings) continued to circumscribe what the Allies could accomplish for the remainder of the war. The last two major conferences in 1943 were at Cairo and Tehran Conferences (Sextant and Eureka). At Cairo, the Allies promised Chiang Kai-shek material aid and several operations in Southeast Asia, including an amphibious operation that Chiang desperately wanted. However, the Allies had to make hard decisions for 1944 based on the shipping, logistics, and amphibious lift. They chose Normandy, Southern France, and the Central Pacific but reneged on their promised operations for Chiang. 1944 proved logistically challenging, as building up the Normandy beachhead took time and Southern France greatly reduced support for operations in Italy. After the invasions of Normandy and Southern France, the remaining major Allied conferences (Second Quebec or Octagon; Yalta or Argonaut; and Potsdam or Terminal) focused mainly on the postwar and the end in the Pacific. Yet shipping and logistics continued to play an essential role through the war's end, the redeployment of wartime personnel, and even reconstruction.

## Current and Future Practice: The Russo-Ukrainian War and the *White Sun War*

Military and logistical theory and the history of Anglo-American global strategy and logistics in World War II provide insight into how military strategy and logistics interact—the two continuously influence each other with logistics circumscribing military strategy. As demonstrated by the Allied logistical overreach in their 1942 North African and Guadalcanal campaigns, operating near the limits of logistics accepts dreadful risk to forces and the mission. Accepting this level of risk in multiple theaters creates cumulative risk, meaning reverses in one campaign could demand more resources, thereby undermining the other campaigns. While this was true for World War II, it raises the question of whether the relationship between military strategy and logistics has changed in current practice or is likely to in the near future.

For current practice, the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrates that the challenge of matching military strategy to logistical capability and capacity remains; however, evaluating ongoing wars always requires caution, especially those surrounded by competing sophisticated information operations like this war. It is safe to say that the Russian Army seems to have forgotten that logistics were critical to Soviet offensive operations. The Soviet Red Army understood that logistics is a function that determines how well personnel and equipment—the means of military strategy—can perform their tactical tasks. Along

with prewar theory on deep operations, the Great Patriotic War against the Nazis taught them how logistics played a crucial role in setting operational reach, understanding the endurance of tactical forces, and estimating friendly and enemy culminating points. These notions and others directly affected Soviet operational art, especially in phasing major operations from 1943 to 1945.

Moscow anticipated a lighting war and planned accordingly—the irony of those who have studied Barbarossa is plain. Although the Russian's operational concept had changed from their World War II deep operations to one that was more methodical and attritional in the 1990s, they still expected a quick victory. Like their former German foes, the Russians believed all they would have to do was kick in Ukraine's door, and the whole nation would crumble. Like the Germans underestimated the resolve of the Soviets in World War II, the Russians completely underestimated the resolve of the Ukrainians, which naturally saturated their military strategy. It gave rise to the following top three flawed assumptions: 1) Ukraine was not a real or unified nation, resulting in its government leaders fleeing and its people welcoming Russia; 2) the Ukrainian military was the same one the Russians fought in 2014 and would not resist for long; and 3) Europe, the US, and NATO would not decisively intervene or support Ukraine.[xvii] They got all three wrong. These bad assumptions contributed to the Russian high concentration of combat forces in the initial echelon, relatively small reserves, and logistical preparation for a quick campaign.

Because the Russians assumed away the need for robust logistical preparation, it follows that they were not concerned that they could not rely on their rail network once inside of Ukraine. The Russians had to rely on trucks moving supplies from railheads that were further and further behind the forward units. As the convoys of trucks continued to supply the front, they began to suffer wastage for many reasons, including poor maintenance and other issues due to Russian officer corps corruption. When the initial offensive culminated, the Russians had to make a new military strategy. They had to reframe, to use design parlance, because Ukrainian resistance exposed the Russian logistical Achilles Heel—by the time they got to Kyiv, the Russians had insufficient forces and logistics to reach their desired ends.[xviii]

The Ukrainians quickly adapted to take advantage of Russian vulnerabilities, such as using long-range fires to attack the convoys, [xix] and the Ukrainians also learned about logistics, although for very different reasons. They were on the defensive, the stronger form of warfare, which normally required fewer personnel and resources. However, the Ukrainians had to mobilize and establish a wartime logistics system to provide what was needed.[xx] Slowing the Russian advance required a heavy price in personnel and ammunition, and the Ukrainians quickly burnt through their prewar stocks, which were three months' worth for most consumables. But, they also lacked the quantity of artillery and munitions of the Russians and had an undermatch in range of their fires and air force. However, the West began to provide the necessary funds, equipment, and ammunition, although Western stocks and production had become very limited in recent decades. Overall, the Ukrainians had the will, the military strategy, and the personnel portion of the means, and the West provided some of the means in the form of money and logistics.[xxi]

More recent events have demonstrated the need for more logistical organization. For example, Western munitions factories do not have the capacity to produce high explosive shells as fast as they are being consumed, a major reason behind them sending stockpiled cluster munition rounds to Ukraine. Also, American-, British-, French-, and German-equipped Ukrainian brigades require different spare parts for sustainment along with many lines of communication, distribution networks, and other challenges. NATO stood up an organization led by a US lieutenant general to focus solely on directing the sustainment of supplies into Ukraine.

Turning to what future challenges are on the horizon, the enormous issue of matching military strategy with logistics will endure while the character of warfare and logistics evolves. In the tradition of Hector Bywater's 1924 *The Great Pacific War*,[xxii] a work of fiction that looked into a future conflict between the United States and Imperial Japan familiar to those who study that portion of World War II, or the more well-known *Red Storm Rising* by Tom Clancy, Mick Ryan's much more readable and enjoyable *White Sun War* provides a fictional account of a near-future Chinese attack on Taiwan. [xxiii] These works are useful as their authors were deeply familiar with the details of warfighting in their era, Bywater in the 1920s and Ryan in the 2020s, firmly grounding their fiction in reality. The authors reasonably extrapolated how warfare would evolve in the short term, including logistics.[xxiv]

Throughout *White Sun War*, Ryan incorporates logistics' effects upon military strategy in a way that is not an afterthought; in fact, he reinforces an almost symbiotic relationship between military strategy and logistics. In a prewar intelligence briefing, logistics played an essential role in judging the likelihood of possible Chinese options to seize Taiwan. The fictitious intelligence officer explores the pros and cons of the options' logistics for assembling the fleet and logistics before the operation, bases, ports, distances, and the security of sea lines of communication (something Bywater took into account throughout his book).[xxv] In a briefing to the USINDOPACOM Commander, a staff officer noted there would be challenges for Taiwan's mobilization,

including the difficulty of supporting this effort after the Chinese amphibious landings had begun. They estimated that the PLA would only land in two main areas—one in the north and one in the south—to concentrate its forces and logistics support.[xxvi] As a final example, although there are more, Ryan noted the logistical challenges for the PLA amphibious operation:

At the same time, supporting forces also had to be landed. These included artillery, engineers, and logistics to both keep the landing site functioning as a pseudo arrival port for the invading force, and also to support the conduct of land combat. While all this was happening, the landing site—or sites—had to be protected against attack from the sea, ground, air, and in the electromagnetic spectrum. Wounded troops had to be treated and evacuated. A continuous feed of new troops had to be landed.[xxvii]

For those defending Taiwan, Ryan had the alliance establish several "strategic bastions" that were large protected operational logistic hubs to support tactical operations. [xxviii] These were twenty-first-century bases that Jomini, Thorpe, and Eccles would recognize.

In addition to incorporating many new technologies, such as human-machine teaming, robots, and many more, *White Sun War* systematically included logistics and its effects on military strategy. Early in the war both sides were running out of many types of ammunition, especially for precision weapons. However, the United States and Japan had successfully secured sea and air lines of communication into Taiwan, although there was not much discussion of how they brought this about.[xxix] Overall, Ryan does an excellent job portraying how military strategy and logistics interact before and during combat operations, as logistics influenced how both sides crafted their military strategy and adjusted their military strategy because of friction due to logistical challenges.

## Conclusion

Military practitioner, theorist, and commentator Major General J. F. C. Fuller once observed, "Surely one of the strangest things in military history is the almost complete silence upon the problem of supply. Not in ten thousand books written on war is there to be found one on this subject."[xxx] In the decades since Fuller wrote this, there have been books written on the subject.[xxxi] Still, very few have explicitly or directly addressed the relationship between logistics and military strategy, and this short article explored this relationship. The theory of logistics and military strategy provided the foundation to begin an inquiry into their relationship. Both world wars are apt historical examples of the deeply interconnected relationship between global logistics and military strategy, although this article only explored the global aspects of World War II. Current practice in the Russo-Ukrainian War validated that the importance of logistics upon military strategy is alive and well in the Twenty-first Century. Finally, recent fictional speculation plausibly demonstrated that the military strategy of future wars, such as those that include human-machine teaming, will remain tied to logistics while forcing its evolution. In conclusion, logistics affect military strategy by circumscribing the ways, defining the time horizon required to achieve the desired ends, and determining the level of risk

## *References*

[i] Lieutenant General Paul T. Mikolashek, USA, Retired, lecture to Strategic Landpower Integrated Research Project, United States Army War College, March 23, 2023. LTG(R) Mikolashek approved the author's use of this quotation.

[ii] Julian Thompson, The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict (New York: Brassey's, 1991), xvi.

[iii] Ibid., 3.

[iv] Antoine H. Jomini, The Art of War (1838; repr., Novato: Presidio Press, 1992), 69.

[v] Ibid., 253-256.

[vi] Colin S. Gray, The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 262.

[vii] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, eds. and trans., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); and George Cyrus Thorpe, Pure Logistics: The Science of War Preparation (1917; repr., Charleston: Nabu Press, 2014). Three other works that are worth noting include Jean Bloch's The Future of War and its technical, Economic and Political Relations, John Lynn's Feeding Mars, and Van Crevald's Supplying War. See Jean Bloch, The Future of War and its technical, Economic and Political Relations (Boston: The World Peace Foundation, 1914); John A. Lynn, Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); and Martin Van Crevald, Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton, 1st ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[viii] Clausewitz, 131.

[ix] Thorpe, 4.

[x] Stanley L. Falk, Introduction to George C. Thorpe's Pure Logistics (1918; repr., Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986), xxv.

[xi] Henry E. Eccles, Logistics in the National Defense (1959; repr., Newport: US Naval War College Press, 1997), xii. As an example of his many lectures, see Henry E. Eccles, "Operational Naval Logistics," 1948, Guest Lectures, RG 15, Box 11, Folder 4, Naval Historical Collection, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI.

[xii] Eccles, Logistics in the National Defense.

[xiii] Ibid, 32.

[xiv] Martin Doughty, Merchant Shipping and War: A Study of Defence Planning in Twentieth-Century Britain (London: Royal Historical Society, 1982), 154-176; Kevin Smith, Conflict Over Convoys: Anglo-American Logistics Diplomacy in the Second World War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5-6, 15-27, and 37-43.

[xv] Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley, Global Logistics and Strategy: 1940-1943 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 52-55.

[xvi] Ibid., 141, 151, 195, 200, 213, 248-249.

[xvii] Author's correspondence with Major General Mick Ryan, Australian Army, Retired, July 17, 2023.

[xviii] Bradley Martin, "Will Logistics Be Russia's Undoing in Ukraine?," The RAND Blog (February 10, 2023), accessed July 2, 2023, https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/02/will-logistics-be-russias-undoing-in-ukraine.html; Per Skoglund, Tore Listou, Thomas Ekström, "Russian Logistics in the Ukrainian War; Can Operational Failures be Attributed to Logistics," Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies, 5, no. 1 (September 8, 2022): 99-110, accessed July 2, 2023, https://sjms.nu/articles/10.31374/sjms.158; Alex Vershinin, "Feeding the Bear: A Closer Look at Russian Army Logistics and the Fait Accompli," War on the Rocks (November 23, 2021), accessed July 2, 2023, https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/feeding-the-bear-a-closer-look-at-russian-army-logistics/; and Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, Operation Z: The Death Throes of an Imperial Delusion (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2022).

[xix] The Ukrainians also used small, mobile anti-armor teams using newly provided Javelin and NLAW (Next-generaion Light Anti-armour Weapon). They also flooded large parts of the north which further restricted Russian cross country mobility, kept them to roads and made them easier to attack.

[xx] This incorporated the following: 1. Military logistics systems; 2. Civilian supply, which is underpinned by fighting on home soil; and, 3. A massive influx of logistic support from the West, which has mainly flowed through Poland.

[xxi] Stavros Atlamazoglou, "Western Countries Have Scrambled to Deliver Billions of Dollars of Military Gear to Ukraine. Gettig It to the Frontlines is a Whole Other Problem," Insider (April 23, 2023), accessed July 2, 2023, https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-internal-logistics-pose-problems-for-moving-military-gear-2023-4.

[xxii] Hector C. Bywater, The Great Pacific War: A History of the American-Japanese Campaign of 1931-1933 (1925; repr. Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2000). Also see, Hector C. Bywater, Sea-Power in the Pacific: A Study of the American-Japanese Naval Problem (1921; repr. Middletown, DE: Forgotten Books, 2012).

[xxiii] Mick Ryan, White Sun War: The Campaign for Taiwan (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2023).

[xxiv] Ibid., vi.

[xxv] Ibid., 66-68.

[xxvi] Ibid., 81.

[xxvii] Ibid., 127-128.

[xxviii] Ibid., 81 and 242.

[xxix] Ibid., 136.

[xxx] John Frederic Charles Fuller, Preface, George C. Shaw, Supply in Modern War (1938; repr., Middletown: Forgotten Books, 2012), 9.

[xxxi] There are several other good books that touch upon logistics. Millet and Murray's first volume of Military Effectiveness's Chapter 1 contains the political, strategic, operational and tactical measures of effectiveness for a military force, and the authors mention logistics throughout. See Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray, Military Effectiveness, Volume 1: The First World War, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

"*In War Transformed* the reader gains a keen sense of how the old and the new in human conflict will impact the profession of arms. A must-read."

—**FRANK G. HOFFMAN,** National Defense University, author of *Mars Adapting: Military Change During War*


# Naval Institute Press

**Use Code MSM for a 20% Discount off of List Price.**

# The Missing Strategic Theory Link in African Conflicts

*Jonathan R. Beloff - Department of War Studies, King's College London*

Photo 25575539 | Rwandan © Alan Gignoux | Dreamstime.com

*About the author*

Dr Jonathan R. Beloff is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Department of War Studies at King's College London. His research focuses on the politics and foreign relations of the African Great Lakes region. His current Arts and Humanities Research Council project (AH/W001217/1) examines the Rwandan Civil War within Rwanda's capital city of Kigali.

In February 2023, I sat with a Rwandan General discussing the current security crisis in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)[i] and whether military operations from either Rwanda or the DRC would be a realistic option. During the conversation, I briefly quoted Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*. The Rwandan General responded with a rather unexpected response, "Why didn't you bring me a copy of his book?"[ii] This began an interesting question of why Strategic Theory, let alone Clausewitz, is rarely applied when examining African conflicts. However, it can provide valuable insights into understanding conflicts such as the Rwandan Civil War, which this General fought.

Describing his experiences during the war, the General discussed how during his military training, even in the Virunga volcanic mountains in the early 1990s, he learned about the history and lessons of Clausewitz. This response sparked a rather interesting question of how Strategic

**To cite this article:** Beloff, Jonathan R., "The Missing Strategic Theory Link in African Conflicts," *Military Strategy Magazine*, Volume 9, Issue 1, summer 2023, pages 36-41.

Theory, and more specifically, the works of Clausewitz, is generally missing within most understandings of African military conflicts. While Isabelle Duyvesteyn[iii] discusses Clausewitz in the context of African conflicts in 2005 by examining the conflicts in Liberia and Somalia, it has not been explored. Despite this General previously studying Clausewitz and others in the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF), Western researchers and scholars researching the continent sometimes ignore this framework. Rather, they utilise a multitude of different theoretical frameworks found within international law[iv], just war theory[v], political science[vi], structural theory[vii], international relations[viii], ethnicity[ix], and genocide studies[x], to only name a few, when examining what are the reasons for African wars and conflicts. Strategic Theory is absent, which is a disservice to a sophisticated understanding of these conflicts, such as the Rwandan Civil War (1990-1994).[xi]

This article briefly examines why Strategic Theory is absent within the theoretical tools to understand African conflicts, specifically focusing on Rwanda's Civil War. It asks why strategic theory is largely missing when examining most of Africa's wars and conflicts. By answering this question, it argues that rejecting Strategic Theory as a critical theoretical framework to understand war in Africa significantly limits our understanding of these conflicts. When mentioning Strategic Theory, some African researchers dismiss it as a problematic framework that does not suit popular academic trends as it rests on the works of Prussian General Clausewitz. This article challenges these notions and introduces the foundational elements of Strategic Theory that can and should be used to understand African wars such as the Rwandan Civil War. The seeming dismissal of Strategic Theory hinders our understanding of African wars as these conflicts hold very few differences from any other Western conflicts.

## Examples of Past Understandings of African Conflicts

Thirty-five conflicts are raging across much of Africa with minimal news media reporting. These conflicts are publicly discussed when it impacts the West or, as those like Meera Sabaratnam[xii] might argue when the 'Global South' impacts the 'Global North' in discussing Western perceptions and interactions with African nations. A prime example is how Somalia's internal anarchy and seemingly constant war after the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 and the accompanying 1993 Battle of Mogadishu. However, the conflict received international attention after Somali pirates harmed international trade routes.[xiii] Research on the Somali Civil Wars often relies on the kinship of Somali clans[xiv] and peacekeeping's politics and operational capabilities[xv]. Another example is the lack of US media attention during much of the Libyan Civil War, except during the 2012 Benghazi attack, which sparked discussions of acceptable targeted killings of terrorists connected to the attack.[xvi]

But the wars within Africa, whether between neighbours such as during the bloody Second Congo War or internal conflicts such as the 2023 Sudanese Conflict[xvii], are generally not subject to Strategic Theory as a means of analysis. As uncovered while researching the Rwandan Civil War, Strategy Theory provides the necessary theoretical framework to understand the military strategy and tactics found in African conflicts. However, it receives some criticism that the theoretical framework relies on what one researcher called an 'old white man's theory'. These critiques how Strategic Theory is an outdated and problematic theoretical lens for understanding the war and hinders understanding not just Rwanda's Civil War but African conflicts more broadly. Instead, research on the Rwandan Civil War illustrates how Strategic Theory provides a better understanding of how the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsis unfolded. This is due to understanding the strategies and tactics of the opposing military actors of the genocide-aligned Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) against the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA). The genocide only ended because of the RPA's tactics and not from mediated conflict resolution or other peacekeeping mechanisms. Nevertheless, the war and Strategic Theory are side-lined in understanding Rwanda's history.

## But Why is it Problematic?

'The absence of Strategic Theory could be the result of it being considered or even accused as part of an outdated system created and followed by 'old white men' in the recent decolonising academia movements[xviii]. Within many universities across the West, there exists a campaign to 'deconstruct' existing academic norms and practices to 'decolonise' them effectively to remove institutional racism.[xix] Utilising studies has not escaped this recent fashionable movement, with the Copenhagen School's Securitisation experiencing these challenges. Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit[xx] claimed that Securitisation was inherently racist rather than Eurocentric. The accusations that its founders, specifically Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, held theoretical, conceptual and methodological deficits that inherently came from their unconscious racism. Wæver and Buzan dismissed these claims and argued that Howell and Richter-Montpetit used selective case readings of their 2003 book *Regions and Powers*.[xxi] 'These troupes of irrationality based on ethnicity or culture are generally absent in Clausewitz or Strategic Theory's neutral positionality in understanding the values and factors that lead political, military, civilian and other actors in engaging and perceiving means of violence during warfare.[xxii] The neutrality of Strategic Theory's research and analysis, away from moral judgements, provides a more balanced approach to studying African conflicts. It differs from what Africans see as neo-colonial critiques and hypocritical

double standards within other fields, such as democracy and human rights.[xxiii] Johan Pottier[xxiv] does discuss the racial elements of the international news media coverage of Rwanda's genocide and the conflict of the 'good' versus 'bad' guys. However, he fails to apply the same neutrality when analysing the RPA as he and later Filip Reyntjens[xxv] fail to use Strategic Theory's neutrality to accuse it and its political wing, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), of being irrational or 'bad' guys for their use of military tactics against genocide military and civilian forces. Proper utilisation of Strategic Theory illustrates how the RPA carried out a strategy using various, including military, tactics to achieve their goal most efficiently.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the debate, the accusations of racism still impact its study. With Enlightenment authors such as Immanuel Kant[xxvi] falling within the 'decolonisation' movement, will Clausewitz be its next victim? Clausewitz was little different from most of his European contemporaries in having views that would be frowned upon today. Within his existing works, the most problematic of his terms might be the word 'savage', which is deployed in juxtaposition to 'civilised' peoples. "Savage peoples are ruled by passion, civilised peoples by the mind" is one of Clausewitz's notable quotations.[xxvii] However, modern interpretations of the words 'savage' and 'civilised' should not be applied to historical figures such as Clausewitz, whose work holds no racial meanings. This is unlike John Keegan, who falls victim to using existing Western narratives embedded in colonial perceptions of African barbarity during conflicts.[xxviii] Despite the earlier comment criticising Strategic Theory as problematic for studying African conflicts, it provides one of the few theoretical tools to study African militaries and tactics without relying on problematic and quasi-racist notions.

Looking through 21st-century language norms, Clausewitz's comment can be interpreted as deeply prejudiced. Such language is now associated with reinforcing racial stereotypes that sought to differentiate Western notions of civilisation from African barbarism that was common in the age of European imperialism. While Clausewitz might have held racial similarities to almost everyone in the 18th and early 19th centuries, one cannot conclude with any certainty that his description of savage and civilised people was made referencing racial notions. It cannot be stressed enough how Clausewitz used the terms 'savage' and 'civilised' people to describe European militaries, specifically the French, during the Napoleonic Wars.

Is the lack of Strategic Theory in understanding African conflicts something that arises from a perception of institutional racism within Western academia? Does this explain why African researchers rarely use this theoretical framework when studying current wars and conflicts? It does not seem to be a very persuasive answer when there is little evidence to suggest Clausewitz, or any other modern-day strategic theorist has evinced racialised views. Why, then, is the more objective framework of Strategic Theory noticeably absent in the study of African conflicts?

Perhaps the answer can come from the broader lack of understanding of African public policy, strategy and tactics. Rwanda's genocide is perhaps one of the most researched topics in central Africa. However, the military conflict, the Rwandan Civil War, is relatively unexplored and only a footnote in other events such as the genocide or the Congo Wars. However, it is critical to understand the war's public policy, strategy and tactics as that, rather than mediated conflict resolution or other peacekeeping mechanisms, ended the massacres. The RPA's victory on 18 July 1994 over the FAR by capturing the north-western city, and last stronghold of the previous genocidal regime, of Gisenyi officially ended the genocide.[xxix] The RPA held a radically different strategy from 6 April to 18 July than during any point when the war started on 1 October 1990. Previously, the RPA sought to seize power to implement the public policy program of the Eight-Point Programme, which called for social, economic and political changes in Rwanda.[xxx] Once the genocide began, the policy and thus strategy shifted to combating genocide forces. Following Clausewitz's writings of war consisting of armies submitting their opponent to their will[xxxi], the RPA conducted various tactics to force its opponent, composing the genocide government along with the FAR and genocide combatants, the *Interahamwe*, to cease the massacres by defeating them in Rwanda and pushing them into neighbouring Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Beyond the research on the Rwandan Civil War, previous study on Rwandan foreign affairs, especially during the Congo Wars, illustrates a general absence in the existing literature on why African nations operated specific tactics. The tactics are often studied within these studies rather than examining the nations' or military actors' strategic intent. The edited book, *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, provides rich details into the geopolitical tactics conducted by various actors without a theoretical review of the strategies for why different nations and rebel groups are enacting those tactics.[xxxii] The reasons why Rwanda fought in the Second Congo War were significantly different from its allies of Uganda and Burundi based on other government policies and strategies to combat what they perceived as genocidal actors.[xxxiii] However, missing within the text are the military tactics and strategies of the different actors, such as Rwanda, Uganda, DRC, Zimbabwe and Angola, during the war.

The understanding of strategic intent, political rationale, military alliances, the appreciation of adversarial viewpoints, and so, is at most only hinted at with some materials such as Roessler and Verhoeven[xxxiv] providing glimpses into the strategy and politics behind these tactics. Applying a Strategic Theory frame of reference to

appreciate the underlying political and military dynamics of this conflict and others in Africa. It would considerably enhance our understanding of these conflicts by examining the motivations, tactics and strategies of the numerous political and military actors. It also departs from the current analysis that merely views such conflicts as the tragedy of irrational/uncivilised impulses and towards greater ways for constructive international responses.

## Theory and Practice

Utilising even the basic foundations of Strategic Theory, such as M.L.R. Smith's *On Efficacy: A Beginner's Guide to Strategic Theory*[xxxv], provides theoretical insights that can help African conflict researchers better understand why conflicts rage for so long. Most African warfare can be understood within the classical works of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz and more modern theorists such as Colin Gray, M.L.R. Smith, Thomas Schelling, James J. Wirtz and so on. The central tenant of Strategic Theory examines how states and non-state actors craft their policy and military activities to attain goals and desires. This is often achieved by forming an overall strategy containing various, but usually military, tactics.

This generalised relationship, along with other important concepts such as Schelling's bargaining and strategic behaviour,[xxxvi] Clausewitz's trinity of civilians, military commanders and forces, and the government[xxxvii], James Wirtz's work on intelligence in strategy[xxxviii], and Smith's description of terrorism tactics within the US-led War on Terrorism[xxxix] provide many insights into warfare and the reasons why actors choose to resort to force to achieve political ends. Despite providing valuable theoretical insights into the rationale underlying the pursuit of goals through armed force, these authors from within the Strategic Theory tradition are rarely deployed to examine African conflict. For instance, exploring the RPA's rationale and decision-making during the Rwandan Civil War provides insights into understanding military operations such as the 3rd Battalion. This battalion spent much of the war's final months conducting humanitarian-driven tactics to rescue and secure targeted Rwandans, as these operations fit within the overarching RPA strategy to defeat the genocide-led government. However, genocide researchers often minimalise or ignore the RPA's strategy and tactics as it does not fit within the research structures found in Genocide Studies.

All too often, as with the Second Congo War, conflicts on the African continent are studied without the theoretical framework and insights provided by Strategic Theory. Beyond examining the rationale for conflict actors, Strategic Theory also contains insights into the decision-making for nations to participate in peacekeeping, a military tactic which Clausewitz might have found, at least on the surface, alien and contradictory to the purpose of war. An example is Rwanda's contribution to African peacekeeping missions. Danielle Beswick[xl] asserts that the Rwandan contribution to peacekeeping is part of its foreign policy to deflect international criticism by threatening to withdraw its soldiers and police from active missions. While seeming contradictory to the promotion of state security, research on Rwandan peacekeeping illustrates how it fits within a strategy for state and ontological security.[xli] Nevertheless, Rwandan peacekeeping fits as a tactic within Rwanda's security strategy.

Returning to the Rwandan General, he requested during my next fieldwork visit to Rwanda that I bring him a copy of *On War* to have in his home's library. His request still provoked some curiosity about why this high-level Rwandan General wished to have Clausewitz's book. When asked if he would read it, he responded, "Yes, as his [Clausewitz] lessons are still true today." This response led to another interesting discussion of one of the primary failings of peacekeeping within Sub-Saharan Africa and how the West often fails to produce constructive policies to end conflicts. He insisted that the lessons of Clausewitz and other Strategic Theorists can help alleviate conflicts as warfare holds little difference whether it be fought in the relatively open plains in eastern Ukraine or the hills of Rwanda during the Civil War. Fundamentally, Strategic Theory provides the necessary theoretical and analytical tools to better understand the military aspects of why African conflicts rage on despite Western efforts such as conflict resolution mechanisms, transitional justice and peacekeeping operations.

Clausewitz's overall explanation of military strategy and the insights of later Strategic Theorists can promote a more sophisticated comprehension of the Rwandan Civil War and other conflagrations on the African continent. A greater conceptualisation of the causes, rooted in politics and strategy, can assist in providing answers as to why and with what intent political actors on the continent seek to utilise the military instrument to achieve political ends. In this manner, too interested parties from beyond Africa can also gain a more rounded appreciation of the character of such conflicts and the conditions of instability within countries like the DRC, which intentionally or otherwise perpetuates a colonial perception of conflict actors as uncivilised and irrational in the manner that Strategic Theory does not.

## Conclusion

The inclusion of Strategic Theory in the study of African conflicts is well warranted despite its current absence. Unlike the accusations against the founders of Securitisation, the failings of Strategic Theory in African conflict studies are not easily rooted in systemic or institutional racism. Instead, it is absent by those who study African conflicts. This relatively short article aims not to provide definite answers to why

Strategic Theory should be better incorporated into our study of African conflicts. Instead, it is intended to initiate a debate as to why Strategic Theory is not often utilised in understanding African wars. Additionally, and perhaps more constructive than just criticising the theory, how can it be incorporated into our understanding of past and current African conflicts? The possible outcome is a greater understanding of the underlying reasons for conflicts and how the international community can stop instabilities, such as in eastern DRC and Sudan, from continuing.

## *References*

[i] Maina, Julius, and Kagure Gacheche. "Conflict in the DRC: 5 Articles That Explain What's Gone Wrong." The Conversation, November 25, 2022. https://theconversation.com/conflict-in-the-drc-5-articles-that-explain-whats-gone-wrong-195332.

[ii] Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. "Today's Armed Conflicts," 2023. https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts#:~:text=Africa%3A%20More%20than%2035%20Armed%20Conflicts.

[iii] Duyvesteyn, Isabelle. Clausewitz and African war: politics and strategy in Liberia and Somalia. (London: Routledge, 2004).

[iv] Clarke, Kamari M., Abel S. Knottnerus, and Eefje De Volder, eds. Africa and the ICC. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[v] Metz, Thaddeus. "An African theory of just causes for war" in Comparative Just War Theory. An Introduction to International Perspectives, ed. Luis Cordeiro-Rodriques and Danny Singh, (London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2019): 131-155.

[vi] Haavik, Viljar, Morten Bøås and Alessio Iocchi. "The End of Stability – How Burkina Faso Fell Apart," African Security, 15 no, 3 (2022): 17-339.

[vii] Hentz, James J. "Toward a Structural Theory of War in Africa," African Security, 12 no. 2 (2019): 144-173

[viii] Beloff, Jonathan R. Foreign policy in post-genocide Rwanda: Elite perceptions of global engagement. (Oxon, Routledge, 2020), 33-75.

[ix] Braathen, Einar, Morten Bøås, and Gjermund Sæther, eds. Ethnicity Kills?: The politics of war, peace and ethnicity in sub-Saharan Africa. (New York: Springer, 2000).

[x] Straus, Scott. Fundamentals of genocide and mass atrocity prevention. Vol. 54. (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016).

[xi] Withheld to preserve the anonymity of the author.

[xii] Sabaratnam, Meera. "IR in dialogue… but can we change the subjects? A typology of decolonising strategies for the study of world politics." Millennium 39, no. 3 (2011): 781-803.

[xiii] Withheld to preserve the anonymity of the author.

[xiv] Kusow, Abdi Mohamed. "The genesis of the Somali Civil War: A new perspective." Northeast African Studies 1, no. 1 (1994): 31-46.

[xv] Albrecht, Peter, and Cathy Haenlein. "Fragmented Peacekeeping: The African Union in Somalia." The RUSI Journal 161, no. 1 (2016): 50-61; Mersiades, Michael. "Peacekeeping and legitimacy: Lessons from Cambodia and Somalia." International Peacekeeping 12, no. 2 (2005): 205-221.

[xvi] Steed, Danny, "Is there a Future for Targeted killing?", Infinity Journal, 2, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 17-20.

[xvii] Fathi Osman, "Sudan: As the Generals Fight, Who's Playing Chess with the Old Islamists?," African Arguments, May 15, 2023, https://africanarguments.org/2023/05/sudan-as-the-generals-fight-whos-playing-chess-with-the-old-islamists/.

[xviii] Bhambra, Gurminder K., Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu. Decolonising the university. (London: Pluto Press, 2018).

[xix] Begum, Neema, and Rima Saini. "Decolonising the curriculum." Political Studies Review 17, no. 2 (2019): 196-201.

[xx] Howell, Alison, and Melanie Richter-Montpetit. "Is securitization theory racist? Civilizationism, methodological whiteness, and antiblack thought in the Copenhagen School." Security Dialogue 51, no. 1 (2020): 3-22.

[xxi] Wæver, Ole, and Barry Buzan. "Racism and responsibility–The critical limits of deepfake methodology in security studies: A reply to Howell and Richter-Montpetit." Security Dialogue 51, no. 4 (2020): 386-394.

[xxii] Smith, M. L. R. "Escalation in irregular war: Using strategic theory to examine from first principles." Journal of Strategic Studies 35, no. 5 (2012): 613-637., 621.

[xxiii] Kagabo, Frank. "The hypocrisy of western opinion on Africa's democratic deficit." African Times, January 12, 2016. https://africatimes.com/2016/01/12/the-hypocrisy-of-western-opinion-on-africas-democratic-deficit/

[xxiv] Pottier, Johan. Re-imaging Rwanda: Conflict, survival and disinformation in the late twentieth century. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002).

[xxv] Reyntjens, Filip. "Rwanda, ten years on: From genocide to dictatorship." African affairs 103, no. 411 (2004): 177-210.

[xxvi] Shilliam, Robbie. "Decolonising the grounds of ethical inquiry: A dialogue between Kant, Foucault and Glissant." Millennium 39, no. 3 (2011): 649-665.

[xxvii] Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 76

[xxviii] Kaldor, Mary. Human security. (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 22; Malešević, Siniša. "The sociology of new wars? Assessing the causes and objectives of contemporary violent conflicts." International Political Sociology 2, no. 2 (2008): 97-112; Vehnämäki, Mika. "Diamonds and warlords: The geography of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone." Nordic Journal of African Studies 11, no. 1 (2002): 27-27.

[xxix] Prunier, Gérard. The Rwanda crisis: History of a genocide. (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 299.

[xxx] Reed, Wm Cyrus. "The Rwandan patriotic front: Politics and development in Rwanda." African Issues 23, no. 2 (1995): 48-53.

[xxxi] Clausewitz, On War, 13.

[xxxii] Clark, John F, ed. African stakes of the Congo War. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[xxxiii] Withheld to preserve the anonymity of the author.

[xxxiv] Roessler, Philip, and Harry Verhoeven. Why comrades go to war: liberation politics and the outbreak of Africa's deadliest conflict. (London: Hurst & Company, 2016).

[xxxv] Smith, M.L.R., "On Efficacy: A Beginner's Guide to Strategic Theory," Military Strategy Magazine, Volume 8, Issue 2, fall 2022, pages 10-17.

[xxxvi] Schelling, Thomas C. The Strategy of Conflict. (New York: Oxford University, 1963).

[xxxvii] Stone, John. "Clausewitz's trinity and contemporary conflict." Civil Wars 9, no. 3 (2007): 282-296.

[xxxviii] Wirtz, James J. The Tet offensive: intelligence failure in war. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[xxxix] Smith, M.LR. "Guerrillas in the mist: reassessing strategy and low intensity warfare." Review of International Studies 29, no. 1 (2003): 19-37.

[xl] Beswick, Danielle. "The role of the military in Rwanda: Current dynamics and future prospects," in Rwanda Fast Forward: Social, Economic, Military and Reconciliation Prospects, ed. Maddalena Campioni and Patrick Noack, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 249-264.

[xli] Withheld to preserve the anonymity of the author.

Edward Elgar PUBLISHING

# The Strategy of Maoism in the West

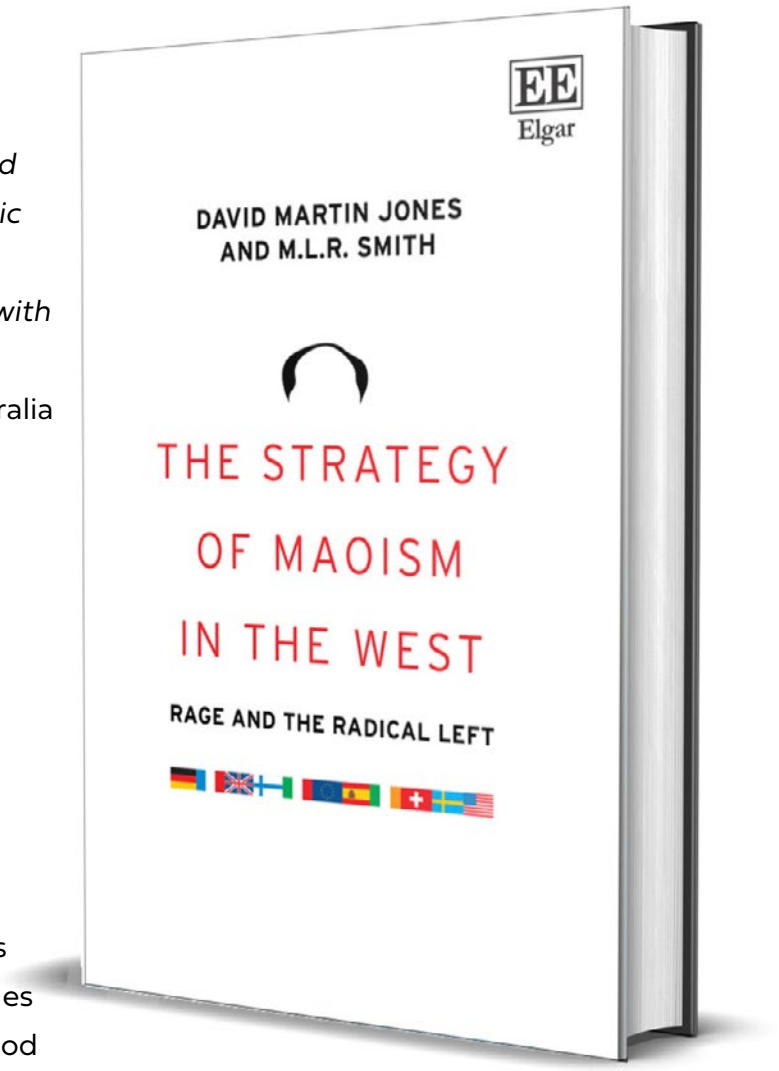
## *Rage and the Radical Left*

David Martin Jones
and M.L.R. Smith

---

*'An excellent expose of the neo-Maoist roots of rage in the West today that has sustained a nihilistic campaign against Western society and state, and which endangers the very democratic liberalism that we value but have taken for granted. A must-read for everyone concerned with what our future holds.'*

– Andrew Tan, Macquarie University, Australia




Investigating 20th Century Chinese ideology through the two main elements of passionate belief and cultivation of rage, this timely book examines how Maoist thinking has influenced Western politics.

Tracing the origins of Maoist ideas in Western politics, David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith expertly apply the principles of strategic theory to provide an understanding of how Mao's ideas made their way from China into Western societies where they exert a profound and little understood impact on contemporary political conduct. The book offers critical insights into key theoretical discourses and their practical applications, including: Maoism, Orientalism and post-colonial discourse theory, Maoism and the mind, and Maoism and the politics of passion.

Forward-thinking in its approach, it addresses the important question of where Maoism will end, analysing the trajectory that Maoism is likely to take, and what the cumulative impact of it upon Western societies may be.

---

**June 2022 c 224 pp Hardback 978 1 80220 945 7 ~~c £85.00~~ c £51.00 ~~c $120.00~~ c $72.00**

# Should Strategists Worry About the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence?

*Vincent J. Carchidi - Middle East Institute - Strategic Technologies and Cyber Security Program*

Photo 171270756 | Artificial Intelligence © BiancoBlue | Dreamstime.com

*About the author*

Vincent J. Carchidi is a Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute's Strategic Technologies and Cyber Security Program, where his work focuses on the intersection of emerging technologies, defense, and international affairs.

## Introduction: The Unspoken Assumption

When individuals talk (and write) about technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), they do so in different personalities: in some instances, as people recreationally interested in the technology, in others as participants in large-scale social experiments with new technological deployments. In either case, individuals take on the assumptions of these personalities. In forums such as this, individuals take on a rather specific personality: that

**To cite this article:** Carchidi, Vincent J., "Should Strategists Worry About the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence?" *Military Strategy Magazine*, Volume 9, Issue 1, summer 2023, pages 43-49.

of strategists. In doing so, they confront these underlying beliefs, going to great lengths to uncover what Francis J. Gavin calls our "unspoken assumptions"[i] about how the world works. Strategists aim to assess and create strategies by pinpointing their "prevailing assumptions" with a "future-leaning"[ii] bias.

Here, I explore an "unspoken assumption" about AI with which strategists have insufficiently grappled: that artificial intelligence is *possible*. There is an unspoken assumption that the wet, fleshy stuff within human (or animal) skulls is unique but replicable, reproducible on silicon substrates. But what if it is not possible to replicate intelligence via artificial means? What if today's "narrow" AI is merely a series of engineering-based workarounds that function as band-aids on the fundamental problems of reproducing intelligence?

Much of the strategic interest in AI is derived from an implicit chain of reasoning. It begins with the assumption that biological intelligence can be reproduced via artificial means. With this reproduction comes capabilities once exclusive to biological organisms. The reasoning ends by linking such artificially intelligent systems with capabilities relevant to, say, new force structures (e.g., the long-term development and adoption of semi- or fully autonomous "AI-piloted" jets[iii]). The "unspoken" part of this reasoning concerns the assumption that biological intelligence can, in fact, be reproduced via artificial means; that the upper limit on such technological innovation is comparable, equivalent to, or higher than that of biological organisms' capabilities. This is *not* about the distinction between "narrow" and "general" AI which, although useful, can incorporate this unspoken assumption in the former in nearly as pernicious ways as the latter.

Strategy's orientation to the *future* is what makes this unspoken assumption problematic for strategists. The assumption that biological intelligence can be replicated informs a medium- and long-term developmental trajectory for AI. For our purposes, what is meant by both "strategy" and "strategists" is not just anything and anyone. For the former, the unspoken assumption about AI directly implicates the three legs of strategy—policy ends, strategic ways, and military means—identified by this journal, albeit in varying degrees. For the latter, this article is for policy analysts, military personnel, academics, wargamers, and interested individuals across nations who see medium- and long-term potential for AI's impact on force structures, doctrine formation, and national policy objectives.

This article begins with a breakdown of how strategists employ an implicit philosophy of AI in their dealings with the technology. This allows for a clearer understanding of how pernicious this "unspoken assumption" can be in strategic thought, allowing us to then pinpoint its origin. This origin story is told in lively detail, illustrating how comparisons made between biological brains and artificial neural networks have thoroughly shrouded the assumption that biological intelligence can be replicated via artificial means. The relevant strategist, it is explained, cannot assume an ever-improving "narrow" AI, as the developmental potential of the technology is sharply limited. The article closes with insights into the relationship between strategists, strategy, and AI.

## The Strategist's Philosophy of AI

Strategy in the "fourth industrial revolution"[iv] is decidedly interdisciplinary.[v] With the breadth of scientific endeavors that accompany it and its intersection with defense and international affairs come a litany of assumptions about science and technology. Yet there is "no such thing," as Daniel Dennett observed, "as philosophy-free science."[vi] The unspoken assumption about the possibility of AI often reflects an implicit and unstudied philosophy of AI.

Indeed, the unspoken assumption about AI is operative in multinational government statements, documents, and initiatives.

In May 2023, U.S. Air Force Col. Tucker Hamilton's hypothetical misstatements about a rogue autonomous drone[vii] highlighted a broader effort within the U.S. military to develop and adopt AI-enabled autonomy technologies with a long-term focus.[viii] Such efforts are supported by figures including U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley who predicted that roughly one-third of "the advanced industrial militaries of the world likely will be robotic" in the next 10 to 15 years.[ix] Milley's comment reflects a view now instantiated in the National Security Strategy of the United States that AI, alongside other emerging technologies, promises to "transform warfare"[x] and serve as one of the "foundational technologies of the 21st century."[xi]

The United States is not alone in this long-term AI focus. In April 2023, Germany's Bundeswehr released its "2035 and beyond" objectives for German naval forces, laying out a need for "comprehensive" integration of unmanned systems alongside AI for surface and underwater warfare as well as enhanced maritime domain awareness.[xii] In February 2023, Japan's Self-Defense Ministry announced plans to abolish its "obsolete" attack and observation helicopters with a reduction of 1,000 required human personnel as it adopts new uncrewed systems.[xiii] Finally, in late-2020, the newly-minted state-backed Beijing Institute for General Artificial Intelligence took up the goal of creating AI systems trained on "small data" while emulating human cognitive abilities,[xiv] with Director Zhu Song-Chun calling Artificial General Intelligence "the global strategic high ground of technology and industrial development."[xv]

Underlying each of these examples is a philosophy of AI. The critical feature common to all is that each lays claim to

a specific *developmental potential* for AI; each assumes that AI can be sufficiently developed to help fulfill goals such as the reliable reduction of human personnel, the robust execution of uncrewed maritime warfare or surveillance in adversarial conditions, or that AI can one day reproduce or emulate higher-order cognitive functions.[xvi]

What if these plans are riding a wave of AI enthusiasm that is destined to fail?

These questions may sound overthetop, especially as generative AI systems drive commercial and defense engagement. But the unspoken assumption that what we do as humans (or what animals do), in principle, can be replicated, is a serious, underappreciated factor in strategy formation in the fourth industrial revolution. If the assumption is incorrect, it will directly impact the utility of medium- and long-term force structure planning, the formation of military doctrines concerning the use of AI-enabled weapons and platforms, and even deliberation on national policy objectives pertaining to AI.

This unspoken assumption is *fundamental*—it considers the distinction between "narrow" and "general" AI a useful but ultimately insufficient conceptualization of the technology's capabilities and applications, casting doubt that the former is, in fact, replicating intelligence and barring the latter from ever coming to fruition.

The titular "worry" is *not* that strategists should be worried about AI becoming "general" and upending the fundamental nature of warfare, as Ares Simone Monzio Compagnoni[xvii] argues. Rather, the worry is that strategists who have witnessed the increasing capabilities of "narrow" AI and now seek to apply it more widely across domains with an eye towards its incremental improvement may be working towards a partial impossibility. It is an *assumption* that narrow AI can sufficiently outgrow its propensity to real-world failures sufficient to justify its medium-and long-term strategic focus. The assumption may be incorrect.

For the strategist who sees the transformative potential of AI, the possibility that the biological stuff is the only game in town is worrying indeed.

## Origin of the Unspoken Assumption

In 2021, AI expert J. Mark Bishop made a prominent case against the possibility of AI in an article bluntly titled, "Artificial Intelligence Is Stupid and Casual Reasoning Will Not Fix It."[xviii] Some field-specific history is embedded in this title that we should briefly review. (I promise it will not be boring—we are talking about our brains, after all).

Artificial neural networks were originally inspired by the composition of neurons within biological brains. The idea, recently emphasized by figures like Geoffrey Hinton,[xix] goes something like this: the human brain is composed of billions of neurons bound together by trillions of connections. Activity between these neurons takes the form of signals sent between them (through "synaptic connections"). The final result of these signals can be expressed through *arithmetic*. Simply put, the neuronal activity of the human brain can be characterized in *computational* terms.[xx]

Over time, this conception of the brain inspired the idea that intelligence can be *replicated* via computational means. We see the analogy between brains and AI in the structure of neural networks today, the most basic component of which is an artificial "neuron." Artificial neurons are arranged in layers, with a simple network consisting of an input layer, which feeds into "hidden" layers, and then results in an output layer. A positive or negative number assigned to connections between neurons in successive layers determines how impactful the output from one neuron will be to the next. That is, the strength or weakness of the connection is determined by this number (positive is stronger, negative is weaker). As a model is trained, these weights change to yield the appropriate output.[xxi]

The "deep" in "deep neural networks" refers to the hundreds of layers of neurons they possess. These networks, in contrast to older, shallower artificial neural networks, are dependent on *enormous* amounts of data to properly train. More than this, their recent successes owe as much to increases in the available computing power needed to process data as to the amount and quality of the data themselves. And while many AI success stories of the past decade use more than just deep learning, this technique underpins most examples: the Go-playing systems AlphaGo and AlphaGo Zero, software underpinning Tesla's and Waymo's self-driving vehicles, large language models like GPT-3 and GPT-4, text-to-image generators like DALL-E and DALL-E 2, and text-to-video generators like Meta's Make-A-Video.

While it would be an exaggeration to say this is all "just math,"[xxii] computation underwrites all of deep learning.

## Burying the Lede

Just as interesting as deep learning's successes are its *failures*—these systems tend to be surprisingly stupid. Deep neural networks are so data-centric that they are confined to the data on which they are trained. Popular systems like ChatGPT—which is designed to simply predict reasonable continuations of text[xxiii]—sometimes appear to be doing something more "general," but this is because of natural language's open-ended uses and our predilection to anthropomorphize its human-like outputs. ChatGPT suffers from serious, unintelligent problems including hallucinations, unreliability, and an inability to distinguish possible from impossible.

ChatGPT is not alone. OpenAI's computer vision system CLIP incorrectly classified a granny smith apple as an iPod simply because somebody stuck a label with the word "iPod" on it.[xxiv] KataGo, a state-of-the-art open-source Go-playing agent, was beaten by an *amateur* human Go player by employing a fairly simple technique (the creation of a large "loop" of stones while distracting the agent in the corner of the board).[xxv] A DARPA object recognition system tasked with detecting human movement was fooled by marines doing somersaults and hiding under cardboard boxes as they approached it without being detected.[xxvi]

These problems are not dissimilar. They are the result of deep learning systems' detachment from any understanding of the world and an ability to reason over data, even though they can often perform certain tasks far better than humans. They are well-documented categories of problems, triggering contentious debates about how to best resolve them. Some, like Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie,[xxvii] argue that these systems need *causal reasoning* abilities: the ability to not only *associate* raw data (as deep learning systems do) but also to infer outcomes from active changes in the environment and to imagine counterfactual scenarios.[xxviii] Whatever the proposed cure one prescribes for machine learning systems, talk of an AI "Winter" or "Summer" refers, by proxy, to how well these problems are perceived to be dealt with.

The unspoken assumption is that these problems can, in fact, be resolved.

Bishop's claim is that they never will be. "No matter how sophisticated the computation is, how fast the CPU is, or how great the storage of the computing machine is, there remains an unbridgeable gap (a "humanity gap") between the engineered problem solving ability of machine and the general problem solving ability of man."[xxix] The reason, he argues, is that computation *alone* can never realize human understanding.

He draws from interdisciplinary arguments to reach this conclusion, the most prominent of which is John Searle's famous "Chinese Room Argument."[xxx] In a nutshell: the mechanistic use of rules to execute a method (i.e., an algorithm) can *never* lead to an understanding of the program's target output. Sure, a machine can translate a language, complete a sentence, or generate new sentences altogether, but all it is doing is executing a method—it is *mindless*, having no idea of what language is, the world that sentences describe, or why a joke in the target language is funny. The machine does nothing *except* execute software—that's it. Modern AI is fundamentally dependent on computational methods operating in exactly this fashion.

Critically, Bishop takes the distinction between *engineering* solutions for automated behavior and *intelligence* via computation seriously: "While causal cognition will undoubtedly be helpful in engineering specific solutions to particular human specified tasks, lacking human understanding, the dream of creating an [Artificial General Intelligence] remains as far away as ever. Without genuine understanding, the ability to seamlessly transfer relevant knowledge from one domain to another will remain allusive."[xxxi] The idea is that AI systems *will* continue to improve, but they will "remain prey to egregious behavior" while forever "lacking genuine understanding of the bits they so adroitly manipulate."[xxxii] The trajectory of AI, in this view, is fundamentally limited without the possibility of resolution.

## Should Strategists Start Worrying?

Strategy takes us to unexpected places, and the philosophy of mind is not the most comfortable landing point for a discipline with much to worry about already. But it might be time to start worrying given the integration of AI with medium- and long-term strategic thought.

The implication of Bishop's argument is that, while AI-enabled systems will see improvements in areas including automated target recognition, human-machine teaming and interaction, and semi- and fully-autonomous tasks, among others, they will always be prone to stupid, potentially catastrophic mistakes—it is just a matter of how likely they are to make them. This implicates strategists who see an urgent need to refine, adopt, and deploy narrow AI-enabled systems, as their real-world deployment will never match the medium- and long-term ambitions humans set for them.

AI systems will never, furthermore, dynamically transfer knowledge from one domain to another, meaning they will remain "narrow." Conceptions of future warfare like the "singularity"[xxxiii] or "hyperwar"[xxxiv] that appear to rely on AI-enabled machines moving with a remarkable speed and seamlessness across domains and between one another is sci-fi now and forever, in this view.

To be sure, Bishop's arguments are by no means a consensus view. He observes that Searle's Chinese Room Argument against the possibility of intelligent computation is one of the most divisive philosophical problems of the twentieth century.[xxxv] Whether it ultimately holds up to scrutiny is not a matter we will resolve here.

Perhaps the ambiguity gives the strategist some comfort, tempted to pin the hopes for AI's strategic advantages less on the intelligence of the technology but the novel engineering workarounds it has afforded—permitted by Bishop's argument. Any potentially "disruptive" technology requires a fortification of individuals', organizations,' and governments' *willingness* to capture the benefits of innovations, as James J. Wirtz argues,[xxxvi] and the engineering aspects of AI may instead be inflated at the expense of its alleged intelligence. This organizational

effort, indeed, appears to be General Milley's aim. It is also the aim of venture capitalists who are practically 'begging' U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to streamline the innovative technology adoption process by the Department of Defense.[xxxvii]

This is an evasion of the problem. Because strategy is "future-learning" and faces an "unavoidability of assumptions"[xxxviii] that never achieve empirical certainty, any strategy involving AI must confront the possibility that biological intelligence is not reproducible via computational means. Otherwise, investments in basic research and adoption of AI may continue to see improvements in engineering but will never escape the problems that plague them today.

Or, maybe, the setbacks that AI has faced over decades really do boil down to the fact that reproducing and inventing intelligence is possible but extraordinarily difficult. Strategists should still not get too comfortable. While I remain agnostic on Bishop's argument, my own work argues that certain aspects of human behavior—but not intelligence wholesale—are unlikely to ever be replicated by machines for separate reasons. On such arguments, no organizational change or investment in basic research will ever yield the technical trajectory for AI that some strategists may desire.

Now is the time to confront the possibility that the crown jewel of the fourth industrial revolution's "commanding heights"[xxxix] is an impossibility. Strategists should have zero illusions about their individual abilities to decisively conclude the debate, as this challenge is premised on philosophical work stretching back centuries, recently instantiated in overlapping fields like the cognitive and neurosciences. Strategists may, nonetheless, be forced to worry about the philosophy of AI eventually, and they would be wise to do so sooner than later.

## Conclusion

The unspoken assumption—that biological intelligence can be reproduced via artificial, computational means—directly supports strategic thought incorporating AI today. While some defense analysts[xl] recognize the poor track record in predicting AI's future capabilities, grasping what this technology's ups and downs over the years might mean for strategy formation remains essential. Because Bishop's argument directly implicates the three legs of strategy's triad,[xli] a diverse range of strategists should confront the uncomfortable possibility that what we do can never fully be reproduced by our creations.

## *References*

[i] Francis J. Gavin, "Unspoken Assumptions," Texas National Security Review, 6, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 3-6. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/46147.

[ii] "What is Strategy?", Military Strategy Magazine, MSM Brief, March 2013.

[iii] Tom Ward, "The US Air Force Is Moving Fast on AI-Piloted Fighter Jets," Wired, March 8, 2023, https://www.wired.com/story/us-air-force-skyborg-vista-ai-fighter-jets/.

[iv] Schwab, Klaus. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2016).

[v] Baptiste Alloui-Cros, "On Strategy," Baptiste's Substack, July 6, 2023, https://baptisteallouicros.substack.com/p/on-strategy. Alloui-Cros makes a careful distinction here between strategy in practice and the study of strategy, the latter of which he deems "interdisciplinary."

[vi] Daniel C. Dennett, Darwin's Dangerous Idea (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1995), 21.

[vii] Stephen Losey and Colin Demarest, "Air Force Official's Musings on Rogue Drone Targeting Humans Go Viral," Air Force Times, June 2, 2023, https://www.airforcetimes.com/unmanned/uas/2023/06/02/air-force-officials-musings-on-rogue-drone-targeting-humans-go-viral/.

[viii] Joseph Trevithick, "Future of Artificial Intelligence Dominated Air Combat Showcased in New Air Force Video," The Drive, July 5, 2023, https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/future-of-artificial-intelligence-dominated-air-combat-showcased-in-new-air-force-video; on U.S. Air Force planning for autonomous "collaborative combat aircraft," see Stephen Losey, "US Air Force Eyes Fleet of 1,000 Drone Wingmen as Planning Accelerates," Defense News, March 8, 2023, https://www.defensenews.com/air/2023/03/08/us-air-force-eyes-fleet-of-1000-drone-wingmen-as-planning-accelerates/.

[ix] Jim Garamone, "Milley Makes Case for Rules-Based Order, Deterrence in New Era." U.S. Department of Defense, June 30, 2023, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3446709/milley-makes-case-for-rules-based-order-deterrence-in-new-era/.

[x] The White House, National Security Strategy (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2022), 21.

[xi] Ibid., 33.

[xii] Bundeswehr, German Navy Objectives for 2035 and Beyond (Bundeswehr: Rostock, 2023), 1-12.

[xiii] Mike Yeo, "Japan to Replace Attack, Observation Helicopters with Drone Fleet," C4ISRNET, February 9, 2023, https://www.c4isrnet.com/smr/defending-the-pacific/2023/02/09/japan-to-replace-attack-observation-helos-with-drone-fleet/.

[xiv] Huey-Mei Chang and William Hannas, Spotlight on Beijing Institute for General Artificial Intelligence (Washington, D.C.: Center for Security and Emerging Technology, 2023).

[xv] Irene Zhang, "AI Proposals at 'Two Sessions': AGI As 'Two Bombs, One Satellite'?," ChinaTalk, March 8, 2023, https://www.chinatalk.media/p/ai-proposals-at-two-sessions-agi.

[xvi] It may be useful to keep in mind that the same reasoning applies to biological organisms like humans who are also assumed to have developmental potentials. Individuals routinely assume humans will develop linguistic, visual, auditory, musical, and social capabilities of very specific kinds—but the only reason why fields like neuroscience and cognitive science exist is that such capabilities are realized to be poorly understood once our unspoken assumptions are brought to light.

[xvii] Ares Simone Monzio Compagnoni, "Will Artificial General Intelligence Change the Nature of War?," Military Strategy Magazine, Volume 8, no. 4 (Spring 2023): 32-37. https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/will-artificial-general-intelligence-change-the-nature-of-war/.

[xviii] J. Mark Bishop, "Artificial Intelligence Is Stupid and Causal Reasoning Will Not Fix It," Frontiers in Psychology, 11, no. 1 (2021): 1-18.

[xix] Will Douglas Heaven, "Geoffrey Hinton Tells Us Why He's Now Scared of the Tech He Helped Build," MIT Technology Review, May 2, 2023, https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/05/02/1072528/geoffrey-hinton-google-why-scared-ai/.

[xx] Bishop, "Artificial Intelligence," 2-4.

[xxi] For a somewhat technical but general overview of artificial neural networks, see, Janik Tinz, "Understand the Fundamentals of an Artificial Neural Network," Towards AI, February 4, 2023, https://towardsai.net/p/l/understand-the-fundamentals-of-an-artificial-neural-network#:~:text=Artificial%20Neural%20Networks%20in%20general&text=A%20neural%20network%20has%20one,a%20Feed%20Forward%20Neural%20Network.

[xxii] Human design and architectural choices matter immensely for any AI system to function successfully.

[xxiii] Stephen Wolfram, What Is ChatGPT Doing and Why Does It Work? (New York, NY: Kiligry, 2023).

[xxiv] James Vincent, "OpenAI's State-of-the-Art Machine Vision AI is Fooled by Handwritten Notes," The Verge, March 8, 2021, https://www.theverge.com/2021/3/8/22319173/openai-machine-vision-adversarial-typographic-attacka-clip-multimodal-neuron.

[xxv] Richard Waters, "Man Beats Machine at Go in Human Victory Over AI," Financial Times, February 17, 2023, https://www.ft.com/content/175e5314-a7f7-4741-a786-273219f433a1; see also, Tony T. Wang, et. al., "Adversarial Policies Beat Superhuman Go AIs," ArXiv (July 13, 2023)" 1-87. DOI: https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2211.00241.

[xxvi] Paul Scharre, Four Battlegrounds: Power in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023), 231.

[xxvii] Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie, The Book of Why: The New Science of Cause and Effect (New York, NY: Basic books, 2018).

[xxviii] See also, Bishop, "Artificial Intelligence," 10.

[xxix] Ibid., 17.

[xxx] John R. Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 3, no. 3 (1980): 417-424. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00005756.

[xxxi] Bishop, "Artificial Intelligence," 17.

[xxxii] Ibid.

[xxxiii] Elsa B. Kania, "Battlefield Singularity," Center for a New American Security, November 28, 2017, https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/battlefield-singularity-artificial-intelligence-military-revolution-and-chinas-future-military-power.

[xxxiv] John R. Allen and Amir Husain, "On Hyperwar," USNI Proceedings, 143, no. 7 (2017): https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/july/hyperwar.

[xxxv] Bishop, "Artificial Intelligence," 11.

[xxxvi] James J. Wirtz, "A Strategist's Guide to Disruptive Innovation," Military Strategy Magazine, 8, no. 4, (Spring 2023): 4-9. https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/a-strategists-guide-to-disruptive-innovation/.

[xxxvii] Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., "Venture Capitalists, Tech Firms Beg Defense Secretary to Speed Up Innovation," Breaking Defense, June 26, 2023, https://breakingdefense.com/2023/06/venture-capitalists-tech-firms-beg-defense-secretary-to-speed-up-innovation/.

[xxxviii] "What is Strategy?", Military Strategy Magazine, MSM Brief, March 2013.

[xxxix] Rush Doshi, The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 5.

[xl] Scharre, Four Battlegrounds, 284-285.

[xli] "What is Strategy?", Military Strategy Magazine, MSM Brief, March 2013.

# Clausewitz as a Practical Philosopher

Vol. VI, issue 1/2022

**Edited by Andreas Herberg-Rothe**

**"Clausewitz as a Practical Philosopher"**

*Special Issue of The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence*

---

"The combination of philosophy and experience, analysis and observation, makes Clausewitz's work a treatise of practical philosophy. The authors of this special issue share a common goal, namely, to revive Clausewitz's practical philosophy in order to understand the current transformation of war and violence in the 21st century."

*Andreas-Herberg Rothe*, Guest Editor.

## Contents

Foreword — *Andreas Herberg-Rothe* / Philosophy and Methodology in Clausewitz's Work — *Andreas Herberg-Rothe* / Clausewitz's "Strange Trinity" and the Dysfunctionality of War — *Terence M. Holmes* / The Thoughts of Clausewitz on Society and State in Times of European Upheaval — *Andrée Türpe* / Emotions in War. The Emotionality-Rationality Equation in Clausewitz's Theory of War — *Bilgehan Emeklier & Nihal Emeklier* / Reversing Clausewitz: A History of a Mistake — *Guilel Treiber* / Clausewitz, Schmitt and the Relationship Between War and Politics in the Interwar Period and Today—*Maciej Witkowski*/Accounting for Alliances in Clausewitz's Theory of War— *Olivia A. Garard*.

---

Available in open-access : https://trivent-publishing.eu/home/140-philosophical-journal-of-conflict-and-violence-pjcv-clausewitz-as-a-practical-philosopher.html

*The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence (PJCV)*

Editor-in-Chief: Andreas Wilmes, PhD.

Twitter : @thePJCV

FB: https://www.facebook.com/philosophicaljournalofconflictandviolence

ISSN 2708-3071