

# The Meaning of Strategy

## Part II: The Objectives



**Lawrence Freedman**

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In discussing the subject of "the objective" in war it is essential to be clear about, and to keep clear in our minds, the distinction between the political and military objective. The two are different but not separate. Nations do not wage war for war's sake, but in pursuance of policy. The military objective is only the means to a political end.

— Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (1967)

Liddell Hart's famous book, which includes this observation, was first published as *The Decisive Wars of History* in 1929.<sup>1</sup> Here was found the early version of his much-quoted definition of strategy as the "art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy."<sup>2</sup> André Beaufre later recalled the impact the book made on him as a young French officer after World War I, disillusioned with the state of French strategic thinking.<sup>3</sup> Before the war, Ferdinand Foch, who became commander in chief of Allied forces, had made his name directing the École de Guerre, formulating what Beaufre described as a "Prussian school." Foch insisted upon the necessity of a "decisive battle" achieved through "bloody sacrifice" and this had resulted in a "systematically extreme strategy." After the war, a new school, led by Marshal Philippe Pétain, dismissed strategy as irrelevant to modern warfare and concentrated instead on assessing "tactics and matériel." This was the context in which Beaufre picked up his French translation of Liddell Hart's book. He found it a "breath of fresh air" and vital to the "rediscovery of strategy." Later in his career Beaufre became an acclaimed strategic thinker, with his own definition that followed Liddell Hart in accepting the centrality of politics. For Beaufre, strategy was the "the art of the dialectic of two opposing wills using force to resolve their dispute."<sup>4</sup>

Liddell Hart continues to be cited whenever strategy is being defined. Arthur Lykke is responsible for a definition popular in military circles: "Strategy equals ends (objectives toward

which one strives) plus ways (courses of action) plus means (instruments by which some end can be achieved)." In making the case for this definition, Lykke argued that:

Military strategy must support national strategy and comply with national policy, which is defined as "a broad course of action or statements of guidance adopted by the government at the national level in pursuit of national objectives." In turn, national policy is influenced by the capabilities-and limitations of military strategy.<sup>5</sup>

Here he used the Liddell Hart quote with which this article opens as his authority for his contention that military means must serve political ends.

That strategy has something to do with translating political requirements into military plans now appears to be self-evident, yet for the period from the Napoleonic Wars up to the aftermath of World War I, it played no part in discussions of the meaning of strategy. Instead prevailing definitions concentrated on how best to prepare forces for battle, with tactics coming into play once battle was joined. In a previous article, I considered the origins of this earlier approach, demonstrating that while strategy first entered the modern European lexicon in 1771, the word itself would not have posed any difficulty to an audience schooled in the classics of Greek and Roman military literature and already familiar with cognate

1 I am grateful to Beatrice Heuser and Hew Strachan for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2 Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London: Faber, 1967), 351. In the original version published in *The Decisive Wars of History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1929), strategy was defined as the art of "the distribution and transmission of military means."

3 Général d'Armée André Beaufre, "Liddell Hart and the French Army, 1919-1939," *The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to Captain B. H. Liddell Hart on his 70th Birthday*, ed. Michael Howard (London: Cassell, 1965).

4 André Beaufre, *Introduction à la stratégie* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1963). Published in English as *Introduction to Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1965) [*Introduction à la stratégie*, Paris, 1963].

5 Col. Arthur Lykke Jr., "Strategy = E + W + M," *Military Review* LXIX, no. 5 (May 1989): 2-8.

terms such as stratagem.<sup>6</sup> The early use of the term reflected the stratagem tradition, referring to ruses and other indirect means of avoiding pitched battles. The term also helped to fill a gap in the lexicon, distinguishing the higher military art from the more mechanical requirements of tactics. The meaning shifted during the first decades of the 19th century under the influence of the Napoleonic wars and the theories of Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini as well as Carl von Clausewitz. This is how strategy became linked with battle, stressing the importance of defeating the enemy forces in order to achieve a decisive result.

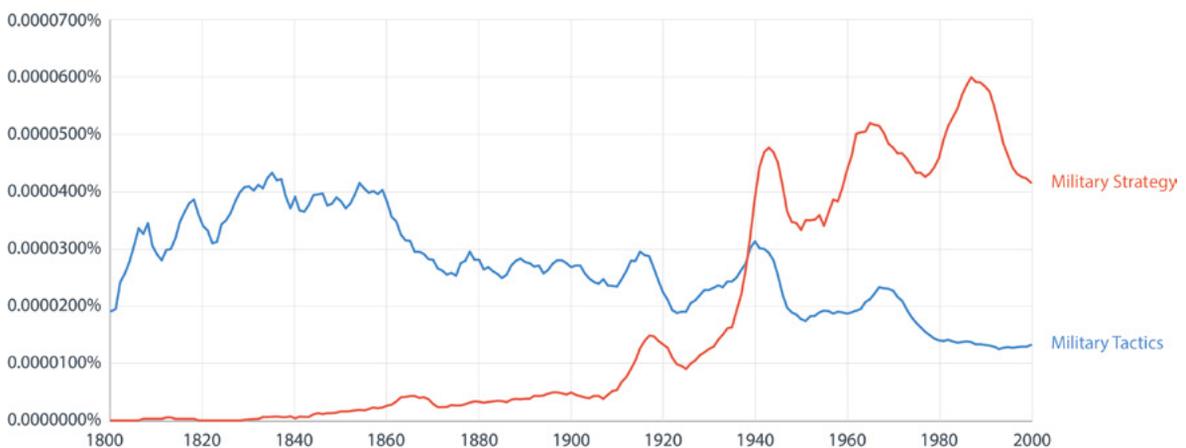
In this article, I show how little the general meaning of the term changed during the 19th century. Throughout Europe, discussion about strategy and tactics continued to be shaped by the sharp focus on battle and what this required of commanders. Whereas the early discussions concerning strategy in the late 18th century opened up new possibilities for thinking about the changing art of war, later discussion shut it down and thus constrained thinking. Despite the strong nationalist sentiments that shaped thinking about war, the participants in this debate were normally senior military figures who were still serving or were recently retired and were primarily concerned with officer education. They read each other's books, if necessary in translation, and studied the same great battles of history from which they drew similar lessons.<sup>7</sup>

The stress on the importance of military history, which meant careful study of the great battles of the past, taken out of their wider context, encouraged a

profoundly conservative approach to strategy. The accepted Jominian view was expressed in the mid-19th century in a moderately influential book by a Swiss general with French training. Gen. Guillaume-Henri Dufour explained how strategy looked back while tactics must look forward. Strategy, he suggested, was subject to timeless principles, while tactics was changing all the time and so varied with the "arms in use at different periods." This meant that:

Much valuable instruction in *strategy* may therefore be derived from the study of history: but very grave errors would result if we attempt to apply to the present days the *tactics* of the ancients.<sup>8</sup>

Leaving aside the question of whether the principles of strategy were really timeless when new technologies were transforming the practice of war, this view helps explain why there was far more focus on tactics than strategy. It reflects the practical nature of the literature, which was full of detailed advice, illustrated with diagrams, on how to cope with all battlefield contingencies. Accepting the limitations of Google N-gram,<sup>9</sup> the graph below is illustrative in terms of the relative importance attached to military tactics and military strategy over the past couple of centuries in the English language (a French version produces a similar result). It demonstrates that, until World War II, tactics appeared far more often than strategy in books on military matters. Regular discussion of strategy only really began in the run up to World War I.



6 Lawrence Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part I: The Origins," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 1 (October 2017), <https://tnsr.org/2017/10/meaning-strategy-part-origin-story>.

7 Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120-121.

8 Guillaume-Henri Dufour, *Strategy and Tactics*, trans. William Craighill (New York: Van Nostrand, 1864), 8.

9 The Google Books N-gram Viewer displays a graph showing how those phrases have occurred in a corpus of books over the selected years.

This is not surprising, as the basic focus was on the need to prepare officers to lead troops into battle. The starting point for the debate on strategy (or grand tactics) was how to raise the sights of those who were normally preoccupied with the drills and maneuvers necessary for battle, but also needed to understand the challenges involved in getting forces in the optimum position when the moment for battle came. At a time when symmetry in the composition and capabilities of armies was assumed, as was the convention that the decision of battle would be accepted, tactical competence could make all the difference. This practical focus came at the expense of the theoretical. With such a sharp focus there was little interest in exploring alternatives ways of resolving differences by force.

In order to demonstrate the stagnant nature of 19th century writing on military strategy, I first turn to the British discourse of the period. At this time, the British were largely consumers of foreign concepts. The definition of strategy that initially had the most influence, and that lingered for the rest of the century, was that developed by the Prussian Dietrich von Bülow. He distinguished between strategy and tactics largely in terms of whether the operations in question were undertaken within sight of the enemy.<sup>10</sup> Conceptually, Jomini was the larger influence. His works were required reading for the officer class of Europe and the United States. Bülow's contribution was not acknowledged because his core theories were so dated. Although Clausewitz's work was known, it took until late in the century before his ideas began to have a strong and palpable influence.

I then examine the challenge that came from two major conflicts — the Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War — noting how the largely apolitical view of strategy was not dislodged by reflections on these experiences. By the start of the 20th century, the idea that strategy and policy represented two distinct competencies was being challenged, in part as a delayed reaction to these wars, but also because of the looming prospect of another great European war. Up to this point, the occasional references to grand strategy in the literature were

no more than etymological false positives. In other words, these usages meant something different from our current understanding of the term.<sup>11</sup> Only the British maritime strategist Julian Corbett saw the possibilities in the run up to World War I. After the war, the combined efforts of John Fuller and Liddell Hart not only established grand strategy as essential to thinking about war, but also redefined strategy so that it was no longer linked directly to battle. Strategy could now address many contingencies and so became an arena for intense theorizing.

## The British Consume Strategy

In Part I of this article, I drew attention to the 18th century belief that classical authors provided vital keys to military wisdom.<sup>12</sup> This was reflected in the reading habits of British officers. During the course of that century, there was a growing interest in foreign — in particular French — authors. This included the Chevalier de Folard, Marshal de Saxe, Frederick the Great, and Comte de Guibert.<sup>13</sup> The sensitivity to foreign publications meant that the arrival of the concept of strategy in France and Prussia was also noted in Britain. A 1779 article in the *Critical Review*, for example, discussed the introduction to the German edition of Leo's *Taktiká* by Johann von Bourscheid.<sup>14</sup> This is where the French distinction (from Guibert) between greater and lesser tactics was reported along with a complaint that the “ancients” were better at finding great commanders. Was this, the anonymous author asked, because there was once a “comprehensive and systematical theory of instruction while our modern generals merely confine themselves to mechanical exercises?” The answer from Bourscheid was that this “defect” could only be addressed by a “systematical instruction in strategy.” This is why he had translated a “didactic work on that subject.”<sup>15</sup> A couple of years later, however, when the same journal reviewed translations of Guibert and Joly de Maizeroy,<sup>16</sup> there was no reference to strategy.

10 Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow, *The Spirit of the Modern System of War*, trans. Malorti de Martemont (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

11 Lukas Milewski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

12 Freedman, “The Meaning of Strategy, Part I”.

13 Ira Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Part I.

14 Johann W. von Bourscheid, trans. *Kasier Leo des Philosophen Strategie und Taktik in 5 Bänden* (Vienna: Josph Edler von Kurzboeck, 1777-1781).

15 “Foreign Articles,” *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature* 48 (October 1779): 310, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015071095007;view=1up;seq=23>.

16 Joly de Maizeroy, *A System of Tactics, Practical, Theoretical and Historical*, trans. Thomas Mante (London: Cadell, 1781); Comte de Guibert, *A General Essay on Tactics*, trans. Lt. Douglas (London: J. Millar, 1781).

The review of Guibert opened with a complaint that would appear regularly over the next century: The principles of tactics, “or the art of war in general,” had “hitherto hardly been established with any tolerable degree of certainty or precision.”<sup>17</sup>

It is also important to keep in mind when evaluating the British debate that during the Napoleonic years, while the French were demonstrating the possibilities of new forms of warfare, this was not matched by any advances in the concept of “strategy.” One of the most important French texts during this period was Gay de Vernon’s *Traité élémentaire d’art militaire et de fortification*, which gained its authority from being approved by the emperor himself. Vernon did not write of strategy or even of grand tactics but of “*la tactique générale*.”<sup>18</sup> In the translation available from 1817, this appeared as “grand tactics” and related to the rules of “attack and defence of two hostile *corps d’armée* acting on uniform ground.”<sup>19</sup>

Over the first years of the 19th century, there was little discussion of the concept in Britain, and even then it appeared as part of an effort to introduce an apparently parochial English military audience to current debates in countries where the discussion of these matters was more advanced. Thus, the *British Military Library* described itself as “comprehending a complete body of military knowledge,” including selections “from the most approved and respectable foreign military publications.” The editors had “spared no expense to procure the most respectable Military Journals and other works published upon the Continent.” In 1804, it included extensive excerpts from Bülow, without attribution and excluding his discussion of how best to define strategy, but with lots of diagrams and formulae. Strategy was described as commencing with establishing a base, and tactics as commencing with the unfolding of the line of order of battle.<sup>20</sup>

Another publication, *The New Military Dictionary*,

also advertised its adoption of French terminology. In the first edition, in 1802, there was no mention of strategy, but it did define tactics as the “knowledge of order, disposition, and formation, according to the exigency of circumstances in warlike operations.” The item on tactics referred to a higher branch — *la grande tactique* — that should be thoroughly understood by all general officers, although it was sufficient for more junior officers to look at the less demanding minor tactics. There was also, following the practice of other dictionaries, a lengthy discussion of stratagems, described as one of the “principal branches of the art of war;” related to surprise and deception, plus the obligatory minor reference to stratarithmometry.<sup>21</sup>

In 1805, strategy made an appearance as “the art or science of military command.” The editor observed that the term did “not exist in any of our English lexicographers,” and there was no agreed view. “Neither the dogmatic authors nor the military [agree] unanimously of its nature and definition; Some give too much, and the others too little extended and the whole consonant with the strategy.” Strategy was the “art of knowing how to command, and how to conduct the different operations of war.” The readers were introduced to Nockhern de Schorn’s distinction between *grande* and *petite strategie*, the higher and the lower, the one for the “officer of superior rank, whose mind is well stored with military theory;” and the second that “appertains to the staff and to a certain proportion of the subaltern officers.”<sup>22</sup> In 1810, however, preceding the entry for strategy in the *New Military Dictionary* was strategics, using Malorti de Martemont’s translation of Bülow, distinguishing between what was in and out of the visual circle. Tactics was now defined as “the distribution of things by mechanical arrangement to make then subservient to the higher principles of military science, i.e., of strategy.”<sup>23</sup>

Bülow was the first in the field largely by virtue

17 It is notable that the reviewer clearly found the section of Guibert dealing with politics more interesting than that on the purely military issues. It did refer to elementary and “great,” rather than “grand” tactics. *The Critical Review: Or, Annals of Literature* 52 (December 1781). Another review of Maizeroy [*The Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal: Vol. 71: From July to December, Inclusive, 1784* (London: R. Griffiths, 1785)] noted his enthusiasm for classical texts and wondered whether these could provide guidance of tactics under modern conditions, and regretted the concentration on the higher tactics while taking the knowledge of the elementary for granted.

18 Simon-François Gay de Vernon, *Traité élémentaire d’art militaire et de fortification: à l’usage des élèves de l’École polytechnique, et des élèves des écoles militaires*, 2 vols. (Paris: Libr. Allais, 1805), 79.

19 John Michael O’Connor, *A Treatise on the Science of War and Fortification* (New York: J. Seymour, New York, 1817), 104.

20 *British Military Library*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1804).

21 Charles James, *New and Enlarged Military Dictionary, Part I* (London: T Egerton, 1802), <https://books.google.com/books?id=pixOAAAAYAAJ&q=stratarithmetry#v=onepage&q=stratarithmetry&f=false>. The now lost word “stratarithmometry,” which was spelled in a number of different ways, was concerned with drawing up an army or any part of it in a geometric figure.

22 Charles James, *New and Enlarged Military Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (London: T Egerton, 1805), 915-916. Milevski notes its appearance, but not the fact that this was borrowed directly from Nockhern de Schorn. Milevski, *Evolution*, 15.

23 Charles James, *New and Enlarged Military Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (London: T Egerton, 1810), [https://books.google.com/books?id=-l0UAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=-l0UAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).



of this relatively early translation. Clausewitz's *On War* was not translated until 1873, although a review did appear in the *Metropolitan Magazine* in 1835.<sup>24</sup> Jomini's *Precis* was published in English translation in 1862 (in a U.S. edition), before his *Treatise* in 1865, although sections of the *Treatise* had become available in an English translation as early as 1823.<sup>25</sup>

This did not mean that their work was ignored in the English debate. Officers were often fluent in French and occasionally in German. Moreover, two of the most influential commentators, both former major-generals, William Napier and John Mitchell, were *au fait* with the continental literature. Napier, an accomplished military historian, was one of the few in Britain at the time who could have written an original book on strategy; but, though he was asked to do so, he declined.<sup>26</sup> He introduced Jomini to a British audience in a lengthy, anonymous article

about *The Treatise* in 1821, focusing on Jomini's consideration of the vital importance of directing the mass of the army against a decisive point. Napier also reaffirmed the importance of military genius. "It is in strategy," he wrote, "that the great qualities with which a general may be endowed will have ample room to display themselves: fine perception, unerring judgement, rapid decision, and unwearied activity both of mind and body, are here all requisite."<sup>27</sup> Thereafter, his own approach to strategy was largely based on the maxims of Napoleon as interpreted by Jomini. He endorsed a book by a civilian, Edward Yates, who sought to produce a treatise on the military sciences "on the model of the best treatises on the Mathematical sciences."<sup>28</sup>

Mitchell<sup>29</sup> was an avowed follower of Georg Heinrich von Berenhorst and familiar with the work of Clausewitz. He wrote that Clausewitz contributed "a very able, though lengthy, and often obscure book on War." Clausewitz was destined to be represented as something of an intellectual challenge. For the rest of the century, whenever he was mentioned, it came with a warning that he was difficult to follow. Mitchell deplored the lack of a British contribution to the "science of arms" despite the country's accomplishments in other fields. The idea that "generals, like poets, must be born such; and that learning and knowledge are but secondary objects to a military man" he dismissed as "excuses for ignorance." When it came to strategy and tactics, he added what had also become a standard comment, that

no two writers have in our time, agreed about the exact meaning of either; a fact which already tells against modern pretension, for no science ever made any great progress so long as its most important technical terms remained vague and undefined.<sup>30</sup>

24 Unsigned review of Carl von Clausewitz, "On War," *Metropolitan Magazine* (May and June, 1835): 64-71, 166-176; this was also published in the *Military and Naval Magazine of the United States* V and VI (August and September issues, 1835): 426-436, 50-63. Clausewitz's *The Campaign Of 1812 In Russia*, trans. Francis Egerton (London: John Murray, 1843) was translated into English in 1843, so he was appreciated at first largely as a military historian more than theorist; Christopher Bassford, *The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

25 J. A. Gilbert, *An Exposition of the First Principles of Grand Military Combinations and Movements, Compiled from the Treatise upon Great Military Operations by the Baron de Jomini* (London: T. Egerton, 1825).

26 Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 18. The proposed title was "The Philosophy of War."

27 William Napier, "Review of *Traité des grandes opérations militaires*," *Edinburgh Review* XXXV (1821): 377-409.

28 Edward Yates, *Elementary Treatise on Tactics and on Certain Parts of Strategy* (London: Boone, 1855), 1. His distinction between strategy and tactics owes much to Bülow: "Strategy is that division of the science of war, which superintends the direction of all operations and the construction of all combinations, except during the intervals of action; the instant at which the opposing forces, of whatever magnitude, come into sight of one another." At this point, strategy left "its presidency," until the two armies lost sight of one another, and then it would return. Tactics was what was left over; it was "that division of the science of war which presides over all operations over whatever strategy does not preside."

29 Luvaas, *Education*, Chapter 2.

30 John Mitchell, *Thoughts on Tactics* (London: Longman et al., 1838), <https://archive.org/details/thoughtsontacti00mitcgoog>.

He then went on to offer his contribution, essentially by delineating the tasks that went under each heading. Tactics was the “science that instructs us in the choice, power, effect, and combination of arms.” It was about “how the individual soldier is to be trained” so that the “thousands” could be instructed “to execute the commands of the one with exact and simultaneous uniformity.” It therefore included “everything that is, or should be, taught on the drill-ground, in order to render the soldier, whether acting individually or in mass, as formidable a combatant as may be consistent with his moral and physical powers.” Strategy, by contrast, was the “art [not a science] of marching with divisions, or with entire armies.” It was about

employing the tactical soldier to the best advantage against the enemy; and, therefore, presupposes in the strategist a perfect knowledge of tactics; it is generalship, in fact, and includes of course what has lately been termed the science of battles.<sup>31</sup>

This did not catch on.

From 1846 to 1851, a committee of officers from the Royal Engineers produced three volumes for an *Aide-mémoire to the Military Sciences* in order “to supply, as far as practicable, the many and common wants of Officers in the Field, in the Colonies, and remote Stations, where books of reference are seldom to be found.” In the first volume, Lt. Col. C. Hamilton Smith provided a “Sketch of the Art and Science of War.” This contained an early reference to “great operations” (the French concept of *grande tactique*) and then a reference to strategics, “a term to which it has been vainly endeavored to affix a strict definition” from Folard to Clausewitz [sic], Dufour, and Jomini. A “dialectician,” noted Smith, “might hint that a distinction might be pointed out between Strategics and Strategy, or Strategique and Strategie; but no inconvenience seems to have arisen from the promiscuous use of both.” He attempted to distinguish between Jomini making war upon a map as strategics, while activities that are then

strategical in their direction, and tactical in the execution, such as landings, march manoeuvres, passage of rivers, retreats, winter-quarters, ambuscades, and convoys, might take the denomination of Strategy, so long as they are executed without the presence of an enemy prepared for resistance; for then they become Tactics.

Here strategy would be comparable to grand tactics. He set out essentially Jominian principles, adding that:

The study of all past wars, ancient and modern, the systems of war of Frederick the Great, of the French Revolution, of Napoleon, and, finally, of the Duke of Wellington, will all be found to have derived their success and glory by conducting the armies in harmony with these principles; and the loss of battles, failures in campaigns and entire wars, will be seen to originate in the non-observance of them, either through the prejudices raised by ignorance or routine, political interference, or unavoidable geographical causes.<sup>32</sup>

This was the “clearest general strategic statement likely to be known to British officers” in the early 1850s.<sup>33</sup> The Crimean War (1853-56), conducted incompetently by the British army, still “failed to initiate much serious thought ... about its strategic role or tactical doctrine.”<sup>34</sup> Military history was viewed as “a great quarry of principles and examples to be judiciously selected to bolster pre-conceived idea or traditional doctrines.”<sup>35</sup>

## The Unchanging Meaning of Strategy

The debate, such as it was, often concerned the boundary line between strategy and tactics. In 1856, Lt. Col. Patrick McDougall, superintendent of studies at the Royal Military College and Napier’s son-in-law, noted wearily that although the “science of war” had been divided into these two branches, “no very cogent reason exists for such

31 Mitchell, *Thoughts*. Brian Holden Reid has emphasized the anti-intellectual culture of the army over the 19th century in Brian Holden Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought: Debates with Fuller and Liddell Hart* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 67, 70.

32 Committee of the Corps of Royal Engineers, eds., *Aide-memoire to the military sciences*, 3 vols. (London: John Weale, High Holborn, 1846-52), 5-7. For another example of guidance on strategy involving repetition of Jomini, see Hon. F. A. Thesiger, *Strategy, A lecture delivered at the United Services Institute of West India, Poona, 1862* (Bombay, Alliance Press, 1863).

33 Hew Strachan, “Soldiers, Strategy and Sebastopol,” *The Historical Journal* 21, no. 2 (1978): 307.

34 Brian Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972). For a less damning verdict see Hew Strachan, *From Waterloo to Balaclava: Tactics, Technology, and the British Army 1815-1854* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

35 A. W. Preston, “British Military Thought 1856-1890,” *The Army Quarterly* 89, no. 1 (October 1964), 60.

separation, the objects as well as the principles of both being identical.” The distinction between strategy and tactics was “arbitrary,” because in both cases “the aim was to place a body of troops in the right position at the right time in fighting order superior to that body which your enemy can there oppose you.” Nonetheless, “such distinction having been made, it is better to preserve it.” Here he displayed the (unacknowledged) influence of Bülow, distinguishing between strategy and tactics according to whether one was in the “actual presence or eyesight of an enemy, however great or small the distances which separate them.” McDougall approached the issue largely in terms of demands on a commander’s time. Tactical activity was quite rare, despite handling troops in the presence of the enemy being the most “prominent and showy quality in a commander.” By contrast, the preparation of troops for battle, as opposed to directing them in battle, was “called forth and exercised in the ratio of twenty to one.” That was why he was so preoccupied with looking after the army, marching, bivouacking, provisions, and movement.<sup>36</sup>

Col. Edward Hamley’s *The Operations of War* became the core British Army text for much of the rest of the century. It was much more substantial than McDougall’s book and earned an international reputation.<sup>37</sup> Until 1894, his was the sole text used in the entrance examination for the Camberley Staff College. In 1907, it was revived as an essential primer on strategy for the army, though not readopted at the Staff College.<sup>38</sup> Hamley — a professor of military history, strategy, and tactics at the Staff College, and its commandant from 1870-1878 — was a clever and versatile writer, yet still looked back to the practice of the Napoleonic Wars. Unlike McDougall, he stressed the importance of actual fighting. There was no point in getting an army into “situations which it cannot maintain in battle.” His view of strategy was that it did its job by reducing the need for actual fighting. The aim, which was pure Jomini (whose influence pervades the book), was to “effect superior concentrations on particular points,” getting the army into such

a position that it enjoyed critical advantages. Otherwise, too much would be left to tactics. Yet, like McDougall, he was not convinced of the need for a sharp separation of tactics and strategy. His concern was that an officer untrained in strategy would rely simply on the routines of military affairs. Strategy meant moving beyond precedent, that is, beyond existing scripts, to be able to “meet new circumstances with new combinations.” This was why it deserved careful study.<sup>39</sup> Gen. Francis Clery’s book, *Minor Tactics*, first published in 1875, went through many editions (the 13th in 1896) and was based on a “course of lectures delivered to sub-Lieutenants studying at Sandhurst.” In this work, Clery distinguished strategy and tactics largely on the basis of size, though as always, “The issue, to which all military operations tend, is a battle.”<sup>40</sup>

The lack of a fixed view about the terminology, though not the underlying issue, can be illustrated by Col. G. F. R. Henderson, considered one of the ablest military historians of his time and a charismatic teacher at the Staff College, Camberley. His concern was that officer education was failing to develop the skills necessary for great generalship. While this was a consistent theme, Henderson’s approach to terminology evolved rapidly. In a lecture to the United Services Institute in 1894, he noted that officers learned about minor tactics to pass examinations for promotion.<sup>41</sup> He complained that “the higher art of generalship, that section on military science to which formations, fire, and fortifications are subordinate, and which is called grand tactics, has neither manual nor text-book.” Henderson regretted that he could not find an exact definition of the difference between minor and grand tactics. He offered his own:

Minor Tactics includes the formation and disposition of the three arms for attack and defence, and concern officers of every rank; whilst Grand Tactics, the art of generalship, includes those stratagems, manoeuvres, and devices by which victories are won, and concern only those officers who may find themselves in independent command.<sup>42</sup>

36 Lt. Col. P. L. McDougall, *The Theory of War: Illustrated by Numerous Examples from Military History* (London: Longmans, 1856), 2-3.

37 Edward Bruce Hamley, *The Operations of War: Explained and Illustrated* (London: William Blackwood, 1866). It was read by Moltke.

38 Luvaas, *Education*, 151. It stayed in print until 1923.

39 Hamley, *The Operations of War*, 55-7. Hamley struck a modern note with his stress on the need to “read the theatre of war” and references to the “narrative of campaigns” — essentially a way of thinking through the demands of strategy.

40 Maj. Gen. C. Francis Clery, *Minor Tactics*, 13th ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), 1.

41 Here Henderson had Clery in mind.

42 Col. G. F. R. Henderson, “Lessons from the Past for the Present,” *Lecture at the United Services Institution*, May 25, 1894, published in a collection of his essays: Col. G. F. R. Henderson, *Science of War: A Collection of Essays and Lectures 1891-1903*, ed. Neill Malcom (London: Longmans, Green & Co.: 1906), 168.

Minor tactics were more or less mechanical, while grand tactics were less predetermined, that is they could not be identified by following the standard scripts.

They are to Minor Tactics what Minor Tactics are to drill, i.e. the method of adapting the power of combination to the requirements of battle; they deal principally with moral forces; and their chief end is the concentration of superior force, moral and physical, at the decisive point.

Henderson's thinking was influenced by his studies of the Civil War. As a company officer, he wrote *The Campaign of Fredericksburg: A Tactical Study for Officers*, the focus of which was indicated by the subtitle. In 1898, now at the Staff College, he wrote an admired biography of Stonewall Jackson.<sup>43</sup> Grand tactics was forgotten, and strategy came to the forefront. His descriptions still combined elements of Bülow (what was and was not in the enemy's sight) with Jomini (with references to strategy being worked out on the map).<sup>44</sup>

In 1898, Henderson lectured on how strategy should be taught. As I note below, this lecture was interesting for its observations on the interaction of strategy and policy, but it also reflected Henderson's conviction that the status of strategy needed to be elevated. The tactician, he noted, was the "more popular personage than the strategist, poring over his map, and leaving to others the perils and the glories of the fight." The strategist only really came into his own when looking beyond the principles of warfare — "which to a certain extent are mechanical, dealing with the manipulation of armed bodies" — to what he called the "spirit of warfare." This involved the moral element that could inspire troops, the elements of "surprise, mystery, strategem." Henderson criticized Hamley for his neglect of these elements, for they were not "mere manoeuvres," but in practice were "the best weapons of the strategist." The published version of his lecture included an appendix on "strategical procedure," which began: "The object of the strategist is to concentrate superior force on the

field of battle."<sup>45</sup>

In 1902, Henderson wrote the entry on strategy for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Here he observed that civilians continually confounded strategy with tactics.<sup>46</sup> Despite his earlier complaint that grand tactics lacked definition, when it came to strategy, the problem was the opposite: "Almost every military writer of repute has tried his hand at it, and the only embarrassment is to choose the best." As such, he adopted the definition employed by the official text-book of the British infantry. Strategy was "the art of bringing the enemy to battle, while tactics are the methods by which a commander seeks to overwhelm him when battle is joined." This meant that "while the two armies are seeking to destroy each other it remains in abeyance, to spring once more into operations as soon as the issue is decided." Thus, the end of strategy was "the pitched battle," and the aim was to gain every "possible advantage of numbers, ground, supplies, and moral" to ensure the "enemy's annihilation."

Thus, throughout the 19th century, British definitions encouraged the view that there was no sharp distinction between strategy and tactics, for the same unit would be involved in one and then the other. At issue were the requirements of officer education, and in particular the balance between mechanical drills, with their fixed scripts, and the need to move beyond those scripts. This required a flexibility of mind and imagination to be able to handle the larger challenges that would be faced in a campaign. This occurred at the strategic level, but the demands of strategy also involved paying attention to very practical matters for which the texts offered clear guidance: how to move forces over long distances, paying attention to medical needs, as well as food and accommodation. When it came to the very highest levels of command, knowledge of military history — looking back rather than forward — was seen as the best form of instruction. The effect was to reinforce the fixation with battle in military discourse, which continued throughout the 19th century. The fact that Henderson could make exactly the same points talking about grand tactics in 1894 and then strategy in 1902 (using the same reference to Napoleon's

43 Lt. Col. G. F. R. Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, 2 vols. (London: Longman Green, 1898). For an appreciation of Henderson, see Jay Luvaas, "G. F. R. Henderson and the American Civil War," *Military Affairs* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1956): 139-15. Also, see Luvaas, *Education*, Chapter 7.

44 He noted that "strategy, unfortunately, is an unpopular science, even among soldiers, requiring both in practice and in demonstration constant and careful study of the map, the closest computation of time and space, a grasp of many factors, and the strictest attention to the various steps in the problems it presents ... the determining factor in civilised warfare ... trained common sense."

45 Lt. Col. G. F. R. Henderson, "Strategy and its Teaching," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* XLII (July 1898), 761.

46 Strategy, from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* supplement 1902. Reprinted in Henderson, *Science of War*. While strategy was clearly the higher art Henderson was strongly of the view that this did not mean that strategy was "the province of the few" while "tactics of the many," so that only those expecting high command "need trouble about what is perhaps the most important branch of the art of war." Yet soldiers could not know if circumstances would push them into command at a critical moment. Those without this knowledge would be "terribly one-sided creatures."

observation in his published maxims that this level required the study of military history) was telling.

## The Impact of the Civil War

The most likely challenge to the established frames of reference for thinking about war and strategy was a major conflict. The Napoleonic Wars had set the frames for the century. The wars that followed this set of great and iconic battles lacked the unexpected and distinctive features sufficient to challenge these frames. The Civil War, by virtue of its length and ferocity, posed more of a challenge, yet its impact on how strategy was conceptualized was also limited, even in the United States. Russell Weigley notes that “the experience of the Civil War failed to inspire any impressive flowering of American strategic thought.” The output from West Point reflected stagnation. American writers stuck to unimaginative concepts of European-style war, not even exploring whether the Indian wars had much to say about strategy.<sup>47</sup>

American strategic thought had a strong French influence from the start. The first textbook at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point was a translation of Gay de Vernon’s *Traité élémentaire d’art militaire et de fortification*, which included a separate section on grand tactics written by the translator.<sup>48</sup> A key position at West Point was the chair of civil and military engineering (a focus which itself says something about the practical nature of officer training). Dennis Mahan occupied it from 1832-1871. One of Mahan’s protégés was Henry Halleck, who became known as a cautious Union general during the Civil War. In 1846, he published a series of lectures, entitled the *Elements of Military Art and Science*. In this work, he observed that strategy could be “regarded as the most important, though least understood, of all the branches of the military art.”<sup>49</sup> Mahan’s writings adopted a similar

Jominian framework.<sup>50</sup>

Yet little time was spent by West Point cadets actually studying strategy, and there was a general distrust of the learned professional soldier as opposed to the inspired military genius. Col. Henry L. Scott’s *Military Dictionary* simply expanded the standard definitions to provide a reminder of the topics that might come under the headings:

The art of concerting a plan of campaign, combining a system of military operations determined by the end to be attained, the character of the enemy, the nature and resources of the country, and the means of attack and defense.

Having quickly disposed of strategy, Scott’s next entry on “street-fighting” was far longer as this was clearly a more enthralling topic. An earlier entry on battle discussed at greater length the views of “Professors of Strategy” on how battle was best approached.<sup>51</sup>

Whether Jomini’s ideas as interpreted by his American followers influenced the conduct of the Civil War has been questioned, not least by Carol Reardon.<sup>52</sup> Carl von Decker’s *Tactics of the Three Arms*<sup>53</sup> was considered better for instruction, while another writer who had fought with Napoleon, Marshal Marmont, had not only reached a far higher rank but also had a more dynamic style.<sup>54</sup> Nor did Jomini play much of a role in the lively debate that lasted the course of the Civil War in the North on how that war should be best conducted. My concern, however, is with definitions of strategy. As with most definitions (including that of Clausewitz), Jomini’s definition alluded to a wider theory, but was not dependent upon it. Despite the experience of the war, in its aftermath no other work commanded the same authority. The war highlighted the importance of political context and showed how it affected strategy, but not to

47 Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War,” *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 438-9. See also Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

48 This was unusual as a key text first translated into English by an American (see footnotes 18 and 19). Michael Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from Independence to the Eve of World War II* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 76.

49 Henry Halleck, *Elements of the Military Art and Science* (New York: 1846). See Azar Gat, *The Development of Military Thought: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16-22. Halleck did note the importance of the “Policy of War,” or “the relations of war with the affairs of state.”

50 Dennis Mahan, *Elementary Treatise on Advanced Guard, Outposts, and Detachment Service of Troops* (New York: Wiley, 1847; revised, 1862).

51 Col. H. L. Scott, *Military Dictionary* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1861), 574. This had not been prepared “in view of the existing disturbances.”

52 Carol Reardon, *With a Sword in One Hand and Jomini in the Other: The Problem of Military Thought in the Civil War North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

53 Carl von Decker, *The Three Arms or Divisional Tactics*, Maj. Inigo Jones, trans. (London: Parker, Furnivall, and Parker, 1848). The translator, Maj. Inigo Jones, had improved the text, however, by interspersing Decker’s thoughts with some from Jomini.

54 Interestingly there was both a Union translation and edition: Marshal Marmont, *The Spirit of Military Institutions*, trans. Henry Coppee (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1862); and one from the Confederacy: Marshal Marmont, *The Spirit of Military Institutions*, trans. Col. Frank Schaller (Columbia, S.C.: Rvans and Cogswell, 1864). Marmont worked with established definitions of strategy.



the extent of forcing a reappraisal of strategy's essentially military character.

Cornelius J. Wheeler, who took over at West Point from Mahan in 1865 and held the position until 1884, showed more interest in war as a political phenomenon, but the stress was still on following Jomini.<sup>55</sup> Only with his successor, James Mercur, do we start to see new possibilities. The first object of the "art of war," he explained was "to determine the time, place and character of battles and conflicts so that the greatest benefit may result from victory and the least injury from defeat." This was to be accomplished by strategy, including logistics. The second objective was "[t]o make one's self stronger than the enemy at the time and place of actual combat." This required "Logistics, Discipline, Grand and Minor Tactics, and Military Engineering."<sup>56</sup> Strategy took priority, but without knowledge

of the other branches its limitations could not be understood. Mercur opened his discussion of strategy by setting as its first goal taking "advantage of all means for securing success." The second aim was to "cause the greatest benefits to result from victory and the least injury from defeat." The first involved "questions of statesmanship and diplomacy." Mercur's list of what this entailed would feature in later considerations of grand strategy, such as "managing the military resources of a nation"; and "conducting international intercourse that when war becomes necessary or desirable, favorable alliances may be made with strong power, and hostile combinations of nations may be avoided." He urged that due weight be given to "financial and commercial considerations" including when choosing campaign objectives, and when deciding on how to organize and train military forces.<sup>57</sup> He

55 Junius Wheeler, *A course of instruction in the elements of the art and science of war. For the use of cadets of the United States military academy* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1878), 11. He defined strategy as "the science of directing, with promptitude, precision and clearness, masses of troops to gain possession of points of importance in military operations."

56 James Mercur, *The Art of War: Prepared for the Cadets of the United States Military Academy* (New York: John Wiley, 1898), 16, 140. Grand tactics referred to "planning battles, perfecting the preliminary arrangements, conducting them during their process and securing the results of victory, or avoiding the consequences of defeat."

57 Mercur, *The Art of War*, 272.

even discussed what would now be called the “security dilemma.”<sup>58</sup> The organization of armies may “constantly suggest an early conflict, and thus produce an irritation which may soon lead to open hostility.” He observed that when it came to choosing when to accept or avoid conflict “statesmanship becomes strictly strategical.” Yet after that promising opening, the analysis became entirely orthodox, with the “hostile army” selected as the strategic objective.<sup>59</sup> Mercur’s book was only used as a text for a short period and is now largely forgotten.

The only book-length study of any note, according to Weigley, was Capt. Bigelow’s *Principles of Strategy: Illustrated Mainly from American Campaigns*.<sup>60</sup> Bigelow was amongst those who took the view that a grasp of strategy was essential for officers of all grades, writing that, “A lieutenant in charge of a scouting party may be confronted with problems which nothing but generalship will enable him to solve.” Although his basic definition of strategy — the art of conducting war beyond the presence of the enemy — was entirely conventional, he sought to redress the balance between tactics and strategy, complaining that too many writers favored tactical skill at the expense of strategic skill. Most importantly, he divided strategy into three kinds: “regular, political, and tactical.” Tactical strategy was about getting “better men than the enemy’s upon the field of battle,” while political strategy focused on “undermining the political support of the opposing army, or at effecting recall from the war.” These forms of strategy were normally practiced in combination. He was not proposing a new hierarchy, and his discussions suggested that the tactical and political forms of strategy were all, in the end, geared toward the purpose of regular strategy, which was to destroy the hostile army. Yet in his discussion of Gen. William T. Sherman’s campaign, Bigelow was at least starting to assess variations on the standard scripts.<sup>61</sup>

Sherman wrote a war memoir published as a

magazine article with the intriguing but, to modern eyes, misleading title of “The Grand Strategy of the Wars of the Rebellion.” Despite the fact that his Georgia campaign challenged assumptions about how wars should be fought — with the morale of the adversary’s population the target as much as the adversary army — he stressed that the principles of war were fixed and unchanging. They were “as true as the multiplication table, the law of gravitation, or of virtual velocities, or any other invariable rule of natural philosophy.” He found that his best guide was a treatise by France J. Soady, which was actually a compilation of thoughts extracted from major texts, although it did refer to Sherman as a “man of genius” and gave a favorable account of his Georgia campaign.<sup>62</sup>

The lack of progress in the American debate is illustrated by an article published in 1908 titled, “The Conduct of War.” In it, the author, Capt. Matthew Steele, argued that it was better to read military history than military textbooks. Military writers undertook to define strategy, yet it resulted in “definitions as various as the writers were numerous.” With each, the term meant what

## Military writers undertook to define strategy, yet it resulted in “definitions as various as the writers were numerous.”

most suited the author’s treatise. Steele adduced that the term could not be defined. Instead, “its meaning must be arrived at by [a] sort of process of absorption.” According to him, there was only one principle of strategy that has “undergone no alteration either real or apparent.” In the end, it

58 Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2007).

59 Mercur, *The Art of War*, 272.

60 Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War,” in Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 438-9. Linn also accepts that Bigelow was “insightful and original.”

61 John Bigelow Jr., *Principles of Strategy: Illustrated Mainly from American Campaigns* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1894).

62 Gen. W. T. Sherman, “The Grand Strategy of the Wars of the Rebellion,” *The Century Magazine* (February 1888): 582-597. Lt. Col. Frances Soady, *Lessons of war as taught by the great masters and others; selected and arranged from the various operations of war* (London: W. H. Allen, 1870).

all came down to being “strongest at the decisive point.”<sup>63</sup>

arguments a remedy for past mistakes” had sought new theories. He continued:

## The German debate was more substantial, although established definitions of strategy remained intact.

Others have denied that there is such a thing as strategy, and attributed all the results of war to tactics. For a small number strategy is the conception, and tactics is the execution. According to some writers strategy is the *science of operations*; tactics, *that of battles*.

Derrécagaix concluded that it was best to stick with Jomini. Strategy was about maneuvering armies in the theater of operations, while tactics was about disposing them upon the battlefield. His contribution was to identify the principles of Napoleon’s system and note that Field Marshal Helmuth Graf von Moltke had achieved victory through their sound application.<sup>67</sup>

### The Impact of the Franco-Prussian War

The other great conflict that might have been expected to have a major influence on thinking about warfare was the Franco-Prussian War. The shock to the French led to urgent efforts to reform the army and restore an interest in strategy. To the fore was Gen. Jules Louis Lewal, who became director of the revived *École de Guerre* and at one point became minister of war.<sup>64</sup> His project included developing a professional general staff and encouraging a hitherto dormant interest in Clausewitz. A new translation of Clausewitz’s work was published in French in 1886.<sup>65</sup> Lewal, according to Luvaas, “was reluctant to admit the existence of strategy as such,” and eventually came to see it as little more than mobilization, doubting that there would be much choice as to where a battle would actually be fought.<sup>66</sup>

This debate, therefore, reaffirmed the importance of eliminating the enemy army as a fighting force. The intellectual and emotional effort went into demonstrating how offensive *élan* could contribute to a weaker force overcoming a stronger. While still instructing young officers at the start of the 20th century, Ferdinand Foch stressed the importance of tactics over strategy. “Following a study which has led to so many learned theories,” he asserted that “fighting is the only means of reaching the end.” Strategy was “not worth anything without tactical efficiency.”<sup>68</sup> The stress elsewhere in the military literature was also on battle: According to Gen. Jules Lewal, the objective in warfare “was to win, overwhelm the adversary materially and morally, to oblige him to ask for mercy,” while for Gen. Adolphe Messimy, “Victory is not achieved through the possession of a town or territory, but through the destruction of the adversarial forces.” For Lt. Col. Léonce Rousset, “One has to think exclusively of battle. All efforts, all thoughts, all preparations have to pertain to its success.” Lt. Col. Hippolyte Langlois added that the main aim

The debate was substantial, but the inclination was still to look backward rather than forward, returning to the Napoleonic era and the spirit of that time. Victor Derrécagaix summarized the debate on strategy in the late 1880s by observing that some who were “desirous of finding in new

63 Capt. Matthew Steele, “The Conduct of War,” *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States XVII* (1908): 22-31. Here he was quoting from Colmar Freiherr Von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War*, trans. Maj. G. F. Lereson (London: Kegan Paul et al., 1899), whose work is discussed below. Steele noted that strategy could “not even be held to a military sense; there is a political as well as a military strategy, and they both fall within the scope of the conduct of war.”

64 J. L. Lewal, *Introduction à la partie positive de la stratégie* (Paris: Librairie Militaire Baudoin, 1892). See Gat, *The Development of Military Thought*, 123.

65 Published as *Théorie de la Grande Guerre*, trans. Lt. Col. De Vatry. See Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 15. A much earlier edition was out of print.

66 Jay Luvaas, “European Military Thought and Doctrine,” in Howard, ed., *The Theory and Practice of War*, 78.

67 Victor Bernard Derrécagaix, *Modern War, Vol. 1 Strategy*, trans. C. W. Foster (Washington: James Chapman, 1888), 3-4.

68 Marshal Foch, *The Principles of War*, trans. Hilaire Belloc (New York: Henry Holt, 1920). This was first published in French in 1903.

was “to ensure that one wins the battle.”<sup>69</sup>

The German debate was more substantial, although established definitions of strategy remained intact. The architect of the Prussian victory in the wars of German unification, Field Marshal Moltke, was more cautious in drawing lessons from his successful campaign, and had a subtle understanding of strategic practice. As a follower of Clausewitz, he shared the view that tactical successes drove strategic outcomes. That is why, to him, strategy was a “system of expedients.” Preparations for battle must be meticulous. But whereas Clausewitz saw the completion of battle as a task for strategy, it was Moltke’s view that once battle began strategy became “silent” as tactics took over. Only once battle was over could strategy come back into play.<sup>70</sup> A number of those who worked closely with Moltke wrote their own books on strategy, including Wilhelm von Blume and Gen. Bronsart von Schellendorf.<sup>71</sup> They followed established definitions of the term. Blume warned against disregarding “the nature of strategy to seek to transform it into a learned system exactly determined,” and stressed the importance of tactics as dealing with the “proper ordering” of the action of troops “towards the object of fighting.” He asserted that all that was “not embraced under the head of tactics is strategy.” This included the “decision as to when and for what object battle shall be joined, the assembly of the necessary forces, and the reaping of the proper result.”

One of the more thoughtful contributions was Prince Kraft’s *Letters on Strategy*. Kraft, who had held more junior roles during the wars of 1866 and 1870 but now had access to Moltke’s papers, observed how the strategist, while not at personal risk, must decide “whether a battle is to be fought or not; on his fiat depends the lives of thousands.” Although he took the accepted line that “it must always be the aim of strategy to unite the greatest possible strength for the tactical blow,” and that it was impossible to be too strong for a decisive battle, he also allowed that there were occasions when actions might have to be taken for purely political reasons, such as storming a particular fortress. He was also aware of campaigns that

lacked declarations of war or a concluding peace treaty, or when fighting occurred when there was no actual war. This raised in his mind whether other ideas might one day be held “upon what we now describe as Peace and War, Policy and Strategy.”<sup>72</sup>

One vital question addressed in the German debate was whether the second phase of the 1870-1871 Franco-Prussian War represented the future more than the first. After the French army had been comprehensively defeated in a conventional battle at Sedan, there followed a period of irregular French resistance. Moltke remained troubled for the rest of his life by the thought that the 1866 war against Austria marked the end of *Kabinetkrieg*, a Cabinet War — one decided upon and settled by governments and fought by professional armies. Instead, future war would take the form of a *Volkskrieg*, with the whole nation engaged in the military effort, rendering it bloodier and harder to conclude. Any peace negotiations would be less straightforward than those following the complete elimination of the enemy army. Yet he did not see any alternative strategic objective. This theme was picked up in one of the most influential books of the period. Colmar von der Goltz, a rising star in the German army, explored the implications in *Das Volk in Waffen*.<sup>73</sup> The logic pointed to the exhaustion of the belligerent nations rather than victory through a few great decisive battles, until the exhaustion itself created the conditions for one side to make a breakthrough. The entire resources of the nation would be engaged, and conscript armies would be formed. Battle would still be necessary, however, and that remained the business of strategy. The counter to Goltz’s pessimism was to put the effort into developing an even bolder plan for the opening stage of a war so that it could be won on conventional lines before it was allowed to turn into such a titanic struggle. This was the approach taken by Moltke’s successor, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, who worked on a plan to ensure the “annihilation” of the French Army in the event of a war, warning that failure to do so would mean an “endless war.”<sup>74</sup>

In 1879, a young historian, Hans Delbrück, reviewed Frederick the Great’s *Military Testament*

69 Cited in Heuser, *Evolution*, 144-5.

70 Antonio Echevarria II, *After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers Before the Great War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2000), 142.

71 Wilhelm von Blume, *Strategie* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn, 1882); Gen. Bronsart von Schellendorff, *The Duties of the General Staff*, 4th ed. (London: H.M.S.O., 1905), 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, 1877-1880).

72 Kraft fought in the wars of German unification, but did not exercise senior command. Gen. Prince Kraft zu Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, *Letters on Strategy*, 2 vols. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1898), 1-2, 11.

73 Colmar von der Goltz, *Das Volk in Waffen* (Berlin: R. von Decker, 1883). Published in Britain in 1905 (based on 5th edition in 1898), trans. Philip Ashworth (London: Hugh Rees, 1906).

74 Robert T. Foley, ed., *Alfred von Schlieffen’s Military Writings* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 172

and concluded that Frederick had been no fan of battle. For him, it had been at most an occasional and necessary evil. This was a provocative claim, for Frederick had been portrayed as setting the path that Napoleon followed, thus pointing to the modern way of warfare. Goltz was one of the first to respond. The debate over Frederick's philosophy of war and its implications for strategy continued for the next three decades. As Foley notes, Delbrück succeeded in uniting an otherwise fragmented officer corps against him.<sup>75</sup> He also came up with another heresy: He suggested that Clausewitz himself had seen the possibility of an alternative to winning through decisive battle (based on his reading of Clausewitz's notes about revising *On War*). Delbrück set out his challenge to established German views in an 1889 article arguing that it was possible to win wars by maneuver as well as great battles.<sup>76</sup> Here came the distinction between *Niederwerfungsstrategie*, a strategy of annihilation that would eliminate the enemy's army as a fighting force through battle, and *Ermattungsstrategie*, a strategy of exhaustion (or attrition) in which battles would not be decisive, but there would instead be an accumulation of pressure that would wear the enemy down. The implication of Delbrück's argument was that, whatever the general staff's preferences, the conditions might not fit the plans and war might take a quite different form to the one intended. At issue was also a definition of strategy. The military's view was that there was a "single, correct and legitimate form of strategy," geared toward battle, such that Delbrück's exploration of how, employing Clausewitz's schema, a different policy might lead to a different strategy missed the point.<sup>77</sup>

Looking back over the strategic thinkers of the 19th century, Lt. Gen. Rudolf von Caemmerer of the German Army mocked Bülow for having claimed at its start to be writing in the spirit of the age. In practice, argued Caemmerer, Bülow completely failed to understand the century's new spirit, as exemplified by Napoleon. Instead of looking

forward to an age of decisive battles, he was looking back to a war of positions.<sup>78</sup> Caemmerer did not entertain the thought that the same mistake was being repeated, by assuming that the great encounters of the previous century were setting the terms for 20th century wars. He failed to consider the possibility that some equally transformational changes were underway.

## Strategy and Policy

The argument between Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and Moltke about the best approach to take toward French resistance after September 1870 raised the issue of the extent to which military operations should be shaped by political considerations. Moltke insisted that while policy must set the goals "in its action, strategy is independent of policy as much as possible. Policy must not be allowed to interfere in operations."<sup>79</sup> The evident flaw in Moltke's argument, which Bismarck pointed out, was that the political considerations then in play, including the possibility of other states coming to the aid of France as irregular French resistance continued, had little to do with preparing to fight a pitched battle. Bismarck confessed that he had not read Clausewitz, but he saw clearly the continuing role of politics once war had begun. He wrote:

To fix and limit the objects to be attained by the war, and to advise the monarch in respect of them, is and remains during the war just as before it a political function, and the manner in which these questions are solved cannot be without influence on the conduct of the war.<sup>80</sup>

This remained the view of the German army. While the militarist Gen. Friedrich von Bernhardi accepted that war was a means to an end that existed "entirely outside its domain" and so could

75 Robert J. Foley, *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun: Erich von Falkenhayn and the Development of Attrition, 1870–1916* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 39–40; Gat, *The Development of Military Thought; Echevarria II, After Clausewitz*.

76 Hans Delbrück, "Die Strategie des Perikles erläutert durch die Strategie Friedrichs des grossen," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 64 (1889).

77 Arden Bucholz, *Hans Delbrück & the German Military Establishment* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1985), 35. Delbrück's magnum opus, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*, was published in 4 vols. from 1900 to 1920. A further 3 vols. in the series were completed by other writers by 1936. Delbrück had a limited influence on British and American debates. His significance was first identified in Gordon A. Craig, "Delbrück: The Military Historian," Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy*; Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy*. His work did not begin to appear in English until 1975: Hans Delbrück, trans. Walter J. Renfroe, Jr., *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History*, 4 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975–1985).

78 Lt. Gen. Rudolf von Caemmerer, *The Development of Strategical Science During the 19th century* (Berlin: Baensch, 1904), trans. Lt. Gen. Karl von Donat (London: Hugh Rees, 1905).

79 Daniel Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1995), 35. See also Barry Quintin, *Moltke and his Generals: A Study in Leadership* (Solihull, Helion & Co., 2015).

80 Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105–7.

“never itself lay down the purpose by fixing at will the military object,” he was clear that politicians should not “interfere in the conduct of war itself and attempt to order to take a particular course to actually reach the military targets. Attempts to do so put at risk military success.”<sup>81</sup>

The sentiment of political non-interference was universal across European armies. The regularity and insistence with which it was expressed betrayed an underlying anxiety that it was not the

## The more Clausewitz was read, the more the relationship between strategy and policy came to the fore.

easiest position to defend. In addition, the more Clausewitz was read, the more the relationship between strategy and policy came to the fore. However, this was a slow process, and did not get beyond the formula that, though the statesman set the objectives, the general must have independence when deciding on action.<sup>82</sup> This was also the position reached in the British debate, although influenced more by the Civil War than the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>83</sup> President Abraham Lincoln, after all, had not only hired and fired generals according to their strategic competence, but also had engaged directly on what needed to be done to win the war. In a classic example of the inseparability of strategy and policy, when Gen. George Meade, the victor of Gettysburg, spoke triumphantly of driving “the invaders from our soil,” Lincoln was distressed that the Confederate States Army had been able to

retreat. The generals needed to get that idea out of “their heads,” he complained, for the “whole country is our soil.” The enemy was “within your easy grasp,” he wrote to Meade, “and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely.”<sup>84</sup> A biography of Lincoln by his two secretaries published in 1890 observed that “talk of military operations without the direction and interference of an Administration is as absurd as to plan a campaign without recruits, pay, or rations.”<sup>85</sup>

Yet in his review of the evident tensions between the generals and the political leadership on both sides during this war, British commentator G. F. R. Henderson reasserted the importance of preventing politicians from interfering in military decision-making:

That the soldier is but the servant of the statesman, as war is but an instrument of diplomacy, no educated soldier will deny. Politics must always exercise a supreme influence on strategy; yet it cannot be gainsaid that interference with the commander in the field is fraught with the gravest danger.<sup>86</sup>

At the same time, Henderson was acutely aware of the growing importance of the contextual factors that would determine whether it would be possible to get into an optimal position for battle. In his lecture “Strategy and its Teaching,” for all its concluding conformity, Henderson underlined how much good strategy depended on good statesmanship. “It is difficult, if not impossible, to divorce soldiering and statesmanship. The soldier must often be the adviser of the statesman.” Strategy should be “concerned as much with preparation for war as with war itself.” He spoke of these preparations as the “Peace Strategy” (that is, strategy pursued at a time of peace as opposed to one geared toward achieving peace).<sup>87</sup> This aspect of strategy was given more attention, as the state of alliances became more salient in

81 Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Vom heutigen Kriege* (Berlin: Mittler, 1912); Friedrich von Bernhardi, *On War of To-day*, trans. Karl von Donat, 2 vols. (London: Hugh Rees, 1912-13), vol. 2.

82 See, for example, Commandant Mordacq, *Politique et stratégie dans une démocratie* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1912); Benoît Durieux, *Clausewitz en France: Deux siècles de réflexion sur la guerre (1807-2007)* (Paris: Bibliothèque Stratégique, 2008).

83 In Luvaas, *Education*, 109, he notes that MacDougall was the first European to include lessons from the Civil War into a military text. Hamley was criticized in a *Spectator* article for his inaccuracies on the American war: “Hamley’s Operations of War,” *The Spectator* 39 (June 23, 1866), 695-696.

84 Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 40-41.

85 John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History IV* (New York: The Century Co., 1890), 359-360.

86 Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson*, Vol. 1, Chapter 7.

87 Lt. Col. G. F. R. Henderson, “Strategy and its Teaching,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* XLII (July 1898): 761.

assessing the likely character of a future war. Thus T. Miller Maguire, a barrister, who was a regular commentator on international affairs, referred to “international strategy” in a lecture he gave at the Royal United Services Institution in 1906.<sup>88</sup>

The poor performance of the British army in the Boer War led to introspection as well as respect for Germany’s growing strength and the leading role of its general staff, and interest in German military thinking. This interest resulted in the translation of key German texts into English. Maguire, quoted above, even complained about the unwarranted influence of German ideas in British military doctrine:

We are overwhelmed with translations of the literary labours of German generals; our tables groan beneath the ponderous and dreadfully dull tomes of a generation of writers who seem to thrive on knowledge of the minutest details of two campaigns — 1866 and 1870 — and of these only.<sup>89</sup>

The greater awareness of Clausewitz brought with it his insistence on war as a continuation of politics, although as much, if not more, interest was shown in his discussions of friction and the interaction of the offense and the defense.<sup>90</sup> Stewart Murray, who provided a short guide to Clausewitz, insisted that “during actual operations the statesman should exercise the greatest possible restraint, and avoid all interference, except when demanded by overwhelming political necessity.” If pre-war preparations were inadequate, that would clearly be a political failure more so than a military one. Politicians were responsible for the war as much as the peace policy, for “preparing, ordering, guiding, and controlling of war.”<sup>91</sup> Moreover, as Lt. Col. Walter James observed, it was, at times, advantageous to follow a more political than purely military strategy to bring home to an enemy the futility of resistance.<sup>92</sup>

The established view depended on a clear division of labor between the statesman and the commander. This would only work if they understood one another. A debate at the Staff College among senior officers in 1911 indicated

## The period beginning in the late 1880s saw a growing influence of naval thinking on wider strategy.

the extent to which questions of politics kept on intruding into strategic matters. The received view was that the education of officers required that they write “strategical papers, referring to military operations in which they might one day be engaged,” but as they did so they should keep clear of political matters. Yet one officer, Col. Launcelot E. Kiggell, observed that when studying and teaching war “politics were at the back of all strategical problems.”<sup>93</sup>

### The Naval Contribution

The period beginning in the late 1880s also saw a growing influence of naval thinking on wider strategy. It was surprising that it took so long, given the well-established importance of the Royal Navy to Britain’s international standing. Introducing a book published in 1891, Rear Adm. Philip Columb observed that there had been an

88 T. Miller Maguire, “International Strategy Since 1891 and its Present Condition,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* 50, no. 1 (1906): 637-655.

89 T. Miller Maguire, *Our Art of War as Made in Germany* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1900), 2. The timing suggests he had Goltz particularly in mind. Maguire was unusual in seeing strategy as a way for the weaker power to avoid battle on unfavorable terms. Geoffrey Demarest, *T. Miller Maguire and the Lost Essence of Strategy* (U.S. Army War College, Strategy Research Paper, 2008).

90 See Bassford, *The Reception of Clausewitz*. For example, Henderson described Clausewitz as “the most profound of all writers on war,” but “geniuses and clever men have a distressing habit of assuming that everyone understands what is perfectly clear to themselves.” As Henderson was thinking of instructing officers, he observed the Prussian’s uselessness for men of “average intelligence.”

91 Stewart Murray, *The Reality of War: A Companion to Clausewitz* (London: Hugh Rees, 1914), 128-133, <https://archive.org/details/realityofwarcomp00murruoft>.

92 Lt. Col. Walter James, *Modern Strategy: An Outline of the Principles Which Guide the Conduct of Campaigns* (London: Blackwood, 1903), 17, 18. Though James had a conventional view of strategy as being “concerned with the movement of troops before they come into actual collision,” his description of what this involved indicated just how broad the discussion was becoming. It included “the selection of the country in which to fight” and “the objects against which the armies should be directed.”

93 Bond, *Victorian Army*, 266.

abundance of literature describing war on land — here he mentioned Hamley — but little attention had been given to naval war: “Of writers of naval strategy there were absolutely none; writers on naval tactics were few and far between.”<sup>94</sup> He did not offer his own definition of strategy, other than to refer in passing to the standard distinction between strategy “determining the locality of battle,” and tactics its “conduct.”<sup>95</sup>

In his introduction, Colomb expressed his pleasure at the recent publication of what he described as a work complementary to his own, written by an American, Alfred Thayer Mahan, the son of Dennis Mahan. The younger Mahan developed his theories at a relatively late age after being put in charge of the new U.S. Naval War College in 1886.<sup>96</sup> He focused on the importance of control of the sea to Britain’s rise as a great power, thus providing a broad and historical context to naval operations. By advocating that America follow the British example, he can be seen as a pioneer of grand strategy, although this was only by implication. It was not a term he used.<sup>97</sup>

In 1911, Mahan published his original lectures in a revised and expanded form under the title *Naval Strategy*, but the revisions did not extend to his definition of strategy, which he had developed in his first book. When he began, Stephen Luce, the first president of the Naval War College, urged him to follow Jomini, although he appears to have required little persuading to do so. In his introduction to *The Influence of Sea Power*, Mahan identified the point of contact between armies or fleets as “the dividing line between tactics and strategy.” He shared Jomini’s belief in the permanence of the general principles that came under the heading of strategy. This is why they could be deduced from history. Tactics, by contrast, were more subject to the “unresting progress of mankind.”<sup>98</sup> When it came to battle, the organized forces of the enemy provided the strategic objective, just as they would do on land. His definition of grand tactics was taken directly from Jomini: “the art of making combinations preliminary to battle as well

as during their progress.”

Yet there was one sense in which Mahan did accept a difference between naval and military strategy. Military strategy tended to be confined to a “combination, either or wholly distinct or mutually dependent, but always regarded as actual or immediate scenes of war.” This could be considered too narrow for the naval sphere. Here there were positions that could be occupied at times of peace that would be of value at times of war. From this came his definition of the goals of naval strategy: “to found, support, and increase, as well in peace as in war, the sea power of a country.”<sup>99</sup> This was somewhat circular, as the purpose of strategy was to increase the power that made the strategy possible. Nevertheless, the stress on peacetime was significant. If the opportunity could be taken to establish naval bases at critical points across the globe, for example, then wartime operations should be much easier. In fact, as with Henderson, the importance of peacetime preparedness as an aspect of strategy was already being picked up by army theorists. As Mahan noted, the importance of certain geographical points as “strategic” in their importance went back to early 19th century strategists such as the Archduke Charles. In Colomb’s work, great stress also was placed on the importance of advantageous strategic positions.

Mahan worked with a narrow definition of strategy while emphasizing the potential political and economic consequences of naval operations. This stress on the wider context and the importance of peacetime dispositions pushed naval thought to a more expansive definition of strategy. This was an opportunity to build upon Clausewitz’s view of politics and war, which his disciples in the German general staff had found awkward, but Mahan came to Clausewitz late, and his works had little evident influence on Mahan’s thinking. This was not the case with the British maritime theorist Sir Julian Corbett, an influential civilian who studied Clausewitz.<sup>100</sup> Corbett believed that naval and military strategy should be considered in relation to each other, and that both needed to be released

94 Rear Adm. P. H. Colomb, *Naval Warfare: Its Ruling Principles and Practice Historically Treated* (London: W. H. All, 1891), v-viii.

95 Rear Adm. P. H. Colomb, *Naval Warfare*, 76.

96 Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1890) and *The Influence of Sea Power Upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793–1812* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1892). Robert Seager, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1977). For a collection of his writings, see Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Mahan on Naval Strategy: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan*, with an introduction by John Hattendorf (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

97 Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1999). Milevski, *Evolution*, 29, describes Mahan as implying grand strategy.

98 Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power*, 8.

99 Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Mahan on Naval Strategy*, 22.

100 J. J. Widen, *Theorist of Maritime Strategy: Sir Julian Corbett and His Contribution to Military and Naval Thought* (Abingdon; Routledge, 2016); Donald M. Schurman, *Julian S. Corbett, 1854–1922* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981). See also Azar Gat, *Development of Military Thought*.

from the fallacy “that war consists entirely of battles between armies and fleets.” He went back to the assumption of the pre-Napoleonic period that the main objective was territory and not the enemy armed forces, whose destruction was at most a means to an end. Thus, he defined strategy as “the art of directing forces to the ends in view.” In 1906, in his “Strategical Terms and Definitions Used in Lectures on Naval History” pamphlet, Corbett divided strategy into “major” (or “grand”) dealing with ulterior objects and “minor” dealing with “primary objects,” which were essentially concerned with war plans and operational plans respectively. The vital feature of major/grand strategy was that it involved the “whole resources of the nation for war” and not just armed force. In 1911, when he revised these notes, he left it as a distinction between major and minor.<sup>101</sup> The distinction, however, represented a breakthrough in thinking about strategy. The ends of major or grand strategy were a matter for the statesman while the army or navy was responsible for the minor strategy, whose purpose was how to achieve those ends. The ulterior and primary objects had to be kept in mind when planning operations. With major strategy, there was a tension between the use of the army and navy as instruments in war while keeping in view the politico-diplomatic position of the country, along with the commercial and financial. This led to the “deflection of strategy by politics” and was “usually regarded as a disease.” This was, however, “inherent in war:” Neither strategy nor diplomacy ever had a clean slate. This interaction had to be accepted by commanding officers as part of the inevitable “friction of war.”<sup>102</sup>

## After the Great War

There was no evident need to reappraise the concept of strategy after the end of World War I.<sup>103</sup> Despite the fact that at the war’s start the “narrow

political vision” of the soldiers was “matched by the remarkable military ignorance of the political leaders,”<sup>104</sup> the interaction of strategy and policy was still being viewed as it had been prior to the war. One widely read book by Maj. Gen. Wilkinson Bird still kept the political and military aspects of war-making separate. He defined strategy “as the direction or management of war” and divided his definition into a peace strategy so “that should war take place it may be waged with every prospect of success.” This would involve questions of funding and alliances, as well as describing the interests to be protected and the “localities where the enemy may be struck.” In the event of war, “the primary purposes of military strategy are to allot and dispose the forces so that the victory in battle will be probable, and if gained will be decisive.” He expressed concern with the fact that “non-military considerations” formed “a large item in the broader aspects of policy” and would encourage “the tendency to meddle with the conduct of operations which some statesman appear to have found difficulty in resisting.”<sup>105</sup>

Even by 1927, the diplomat, politician, and military historian, Sir William Oman, recognized he was being controversial when he urged the need for “the directing classes in any nation” to “have a certain general knowledge of the history of the Art of War” and not feel “bound to accept blindfold the orders of their military mentors.” He was aware that he was ignoring warnings of “amateur strategy.” Still, he could not accept the view that once a political leader set down the political ends of war, it could “wash his hands of the whole matter, and make no comment, criticism, or interference on what the military authority may do.” It was not good enough to see the political role as simply making sure that the military had “whatever men, money and munitions as required.” The military were as fallible as anybody else. However sparingly used, the civilian leadership “must retain some power to comment, to criticize, even to quash.” It

101 In an earlier work, he had referred to “higher” strategy. Milevski, *Evolution*, 37.

102 Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), 308. The “The Green Pamphlet” of 1909 appears as an appendix.

103 See for example William Keith Naylor, *Principles of Strategy with Historical Illustrations* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: General Services School Press, 1921): “The division between strategy and tactics is generally known and everyone fairly knows under which head to place any single act, without knowing distinctly the grounds on which the classification is founded.” Naylor stuck with Jomini. German military writing kept the old definitions.

104 Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Vol. I: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 99.

105 Gen. W. Bird, *The Direction of War: A Study of Strategy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 14, 27, 43. The list of authorities he provides are largely those mentioned in this study based on the Napoleonic wars. He does not include Corbett. This was, however, part of a series of which Corbett was the general editor.

was dangerous to lay down a strict and rigid rule of non-interference by the civil power.<sup>106</sup>

The views of Col. John “Boney” Fuller and Capt. Basil Liddell Hart had both been shaped by the fighting on the Western Front and they originally made their names by developing ideas for the mechanization for the Army. In 1923, Fuller, the senior and more original of the two, picked up on Corbett’s reference to grand strategy.<sup>107</sup> Once it was accepted that the effectiveness of the military instrument had to be discussed in the context of the other instruments of state policy, then it was clear that a military victory was no longer adequate. The focus of war, insisted Fuller, should be “to enforce the policy of the nation at the least cost to itself and to the enemy and, consequently, to the world.” The grand strategist had to understand commerce and finance, as well as politics, culture, and history, in order to “form the pillars of the military arch which it is his duty to construct.”

Fuller offered a completely new approach to warfare in his 1926 book, *The Foundations of the Science of War*.<sup>108</sup> The ambition and complexity of the book’s arguments limited its appeal. In the book, Fuller argued that the aim of military operations was to encourage a form of nervous breakdown on the enemy side rather than to emerge victorious from battle. With grand strategy, “the political object” was to win the war, while with grand tactics the object was the “destruction of the enemy’s plan.” The object of strategy was “to disintegrate the enemy’s power of cooperation” and of tactics “to destroy his activity.” Yet while this was a bolder conceptual framework, Fuller’s actual understanding of strategy remained orthodox. In lectures given in the early 1930s, he was still describing strategy in terms of battle: “the advance to the battlefield is

a strategical act.” As soon as there was contact, tactics would “begin to shape themselves.”<sup>109</sup> It is important to note that, although grand tactics has been compared to contemporary descriptions of the “operational level,” for Fuller it does not appear simply as an intermediate stage between strategy and minor tactics. Minor tactics, he explained, reflected a “different expression of force.” Whereas grand tactics were concerned with the “mental destruction” of the enemy, minor tactics came into play when it was necessary to move into physical destruction (“when the mind of the enemy’s commander can only be attacked through the bodies of his men”).<sup>110</sup> As Milevski notes, Fuller’s use of the term strategy is often “odd.” Fuller admitted to Liddell Hart that “I find it most difficult to suggest a suitable definition of strategy.”<sup>111</sup>

On strategy, Liddell Hart, though more derivative in his ideas, produced sharper and, in the end, more lasting language.<sup>112</sup> The key conceptual breakthrough came in a short piece written in June 1924 titled “The Napoleonic Fallacy,” which was published in a relatively obscure journal, although it was eventually reworked (as was Liddell Hart’s habit) in his first theoretical book, *Paris; Or the Future of War*<sup>113</sup> and in subsequent books. There was no new definition of strategy, but, following Fuller, he established that the objective of war was a good peace — an “honourable, prosperous, and secure existence.” This set as the military’s aim to subdue the enemy’s “will to resist, with the least possible human and economic loss.” On this basis, and in contrast to “The Napoleonic Fallacy,” the “destruction of the enemy’s armed forces is but a means and not necessarily an inevitable or infallible one to the attainment of the real objective.” It was “the function of grand strategy to discover and exploit the Achilles’ heel of the

106 Sir Charles Oman, “A Defence of Military History,” *The Study of War for Statesmen and Citizens*, ed. Sir George Aston (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1927), v-vi, 40-1. The former Foreign Secretary, Viscount Grey of Fallodon, introduced the volume observing that civilians who may play a part in government in time of war should study the principles of war, and particularly the great mistakes that civilian governments have made in military and naval strategy (adding he must share responsibility for some of those in the recent war).

107 J. F. C. Fuller, *The Reformation of War* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1923), 214. On Fuller, see Gat, *Fascists and Liberal Visions of War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and Brian Holden Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought*.

108 J. F. C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (London: Hutchinson, 1926).

109 Reid, *Studies in British Military Thought*, 107-8, 154-5.

110 J. F. C. Fuller, *Foundations*, 110.

111 Milevski, *Evolution*, 51.

112 His first effort at definitions was unsuccessful. In 1923, he distinguished between tactics as the “domain of weapons” and concerned with destruction, while strategy was the “the science of communications,” largely concerned with movement. B. H. Liddell Hart, “The Next Great War,” *Royal Engineers Journal* XXXVIII (March 1924). An excellent source on the development of Liddell Hart’s concepts is Lt. Col. Richard M. Swain, *B. H. Liddell Hart; Theorist for the 21st Century* (Fort Leavenworth, KA: Advanced Operational Studies School for Advanced Military Studies, U. S. Command and General Staff College, 1986). See also Swain’s “B. H. Liddell Hart and the Creation of a Theory of War, 1919-1933,” *Armed Forces & Society* 17, no. 1 (1990): 35-51 and Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought* (London: Cassell, 1977).

113 B.H. Liddell Hart, *Paris: Or, The Future of War* (London: Dutton, 1925).

enemy nation; to strike not against its strongest bulwark but against its most vulnerable spot.”<sup>114</sup>

In a letter in late November 1927, Liddell Hart denied that he was offering a “one-sided refutation of battle as a means of victory,” but more an argument “to remedy the lopsidedness which has arisen through over-emphasis on battle as the *all-important* means to victory.” Here he identified for the first time his theory of “The Strategy of the Indirect Approach,” according to which “the dislocation of the enemy’s moral, mental or material balance is the vital prelude to an attempt at his overthrow.”<sup>115</sup> This was the theme of his most lasting book, *The Decisive Wars of History*,<sup>116</sup> in which he rejected Clausewitz’s definition — “the employment of battle as a means to gain the object of war” because this took for granted the necessity of battle. He preferred a definition he attributed to Moltke: “the practical adaptation of the means placed at a general’s disposal to the attainment of the object.”<sup>117</sup> From this definition, he formulated his own: “the distribution and transmission of military means to fulfill the ends of policy.” Much later, “transmission” was replaced by “employment.”<sup>118</sup> He limited tactics to matters concerned with “the fighting.” Grand strategy was about the coordination and direction of all the resources of the nation to the attainment of the political object of the war. Unlike Fuller, Liddell Hart saw no need for a separate concept of grand tactics. His definitions were part of a package of propositions geared to the promotion of his indirect approach so as to avoid desperate frontal assaults. In his wariness of battle, he was looking back to the 18th century and some of the ideas that animated the earliest discussions of strategy. But the advantage of his definitions was that they did not require accepting the

whole package. The key shift was to accept that there were a number of ways to use armed force, and that the most advantageous way in a given scenario depended on a keen understanding of the political context.

During the interwar years, references to grand strategy became increasingly frequent. This was the combined result of more thought being given to World War I and the rise of aggressive militarism in the 1930s. In a book published during World War II, the historian Cyril Falls did not seem to understand that the term grand strategy was of comparatively recent origin. He considered strategy to be a matter for the “commander-in-chief”, and described tactics as the “art of fighting,” beginning where strategy ended. This left the demarcation point between the two hard to identify. This was an observation that could have been made a century earlier. Or else, Falls suggested, perhaps strategy referred to what was done on a great scale and tactics on a minor scale, or else strategy was “the province of the virtuoso, tactics that of the artisan.” In practice, the strategic choices were usually limited, and so it was the slog of tactics that got results.<sup>119</sup> Also during the war, Field Marshall Lord Wavell, who had begun his military career in the Boer War and ended it as commander-in-chief for India, challenged Liddell Hart’s view that strategy was gaining in importance: “I hold that tactics, the art of handling troops on the battlefield, is and always will be a more difficult and more important part of the general’s task than strategy, the art of bringing forces to the battlefield in a favorable position.”<sup>120</sup> It was after World War II that Liddell Hart’s definition began to stick, helped by his growing reputation as a prophet of limited war and the publication of his classic book on strategy in 1967. In a volume

114 B. H. Liddell Hart, “The Napoleonic Fallacy; The Moral Objective in War,” *Empire Review* 1 (May 1925), 510-520. For the date of composition, see B. H. Liddell Hart, *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1965), I, 75.

115 Swain, “B. H. Liddell Hart,” 42. The extent to which Liddell Hart’s ideas derived from Corbett and Fuller is well-known. Less appreciated, perhaps, is his debt to Sun Tzu, which he read for the first time in 1927. He later attested to Sun Tzu’s impact upon him and quoted him liberally. “In one short book,” he observed, “was embodied almost as much about the fundamentals of strategy and tactics as I had covered in more than twenty books.” B. H. Liddell Hart, “Foreword” in Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), vii. See also Derek M. C. Yuen, *Deciphering Sun Tzu: How to Read the Art of War* (London: Hurst & Co, 2014). The links between Sun Tzu’s formulations and his own are pronounced.

116 B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Decisive Wars of History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1929).

117 Robert Foley has been unable to trace this quote and notes that Liddell Hart’s source is unclear, and is possibly a poor translation. “Can Strategy be Reduced to a Formula of S=E+W+M?” *Defence in Depth* (November 2014), <https://defenceindepth.co/2014/11/03/can-strategy-be-reduced-to-a-formula-of-s-e-w-m>.

118 “Transmission” was removed in the 1954 version, published as “Strategy: The Indirect Approach” (always his preferred title). The 1967 edition has the definition now generally used.

119 Cyril Falls, *Ordeal by Battle* (London: Methuen, 1943), vol. 5, 74. He mentions Fuller in passing but not Liddell Hart, although there is a slighting reference to the indirect approach: “the neophyte may imagine that the ideal procedure would be to march straight round the enemy’s flank and get astride his communications. ... But it would only serve against an army which could be relied upon to submit tamely to the process.”

120 Lord Wavell, *Soldiers and Soldiering* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 47. Cited in Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 12-14.

published in 1970 titled *Problems of Modern Strategy*, Michael Howard opened his essay observing that Liddell Hart's definition was "as good as any, and better than most."<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

In the same volume as Howard's essay, the French political theorist Raymond Aron noted that the appropriate contrast for strategy was tactics, but that "modern authors" tended to contrast it instead with "policy." The result was that there was "now no difference between what was once called a policy and what one now calls strategy."<sup>122</sup> In 2005, Hew Strachan made a similar point. The view of strategy developed by the early 20th century was "based on universal principles, institutionalized, disseminated, and at ease with itself." Strategy was only one of the components of war, but it was "the central element sandwiched between national policy on the one hand and tactics on the other." If there was a problem it "lay not in its definition but in its boundaries with policy."<sup>123</sup> This was a natural consequence of the decline of the soldier-sovereigns and the need to manage relations between the civil and military spheres, each with its distinct role and responsibilities.

As this article has shown, there was a boundary problem on the other side as well. Numerous writers observed that the distinction between strategy and tactics was hardly clear-cut. It was difficult to separate out the preparations for fighting and actual fighting, or to distinguish activities according to the responsible level of command. This was why ideas of grand tactics kept on intruding. It was also the area in which writers on colonial wars saw the most significant difference with regular warfare. The impact of colonial wars, which was the main preoccupation of the army, was more ambiguous because these wars tended to be seen as special cases.<sup>124</sup> This particular boundary problem, unlike that with policy, was manageable because all the activities were military responsibilities.

The boundary problem between strategy and policy went to the heart of civil-military relations and by the start of the 20th century was increasingly hard to play down. The proper relationship was supposed to involve the government setting policy which would be handed down as the objectives of the war to the military commanders responsible for strategy. They would then turn them into war plans. The basic problem, perhaps more in theory than in practice, was that war plans were always expected to come down to the elimination of the enemy army as a fighting force. That is how strategy was presented for purposes of officer education. Without such a sharp focus on defeating the enemy army, discussions of strategy would have opened up earlier. In that case, however, the need to cover a great variety of types of engagement would have undermined all efforts to provide detailed advice on standardized operations. The narrow approach therefore facilitated the military curriculum but at the expense of failing to prepare officers for contingencies other than those of a pitched battle.

After World War I, a narrow approach to strategy appeared inadequate. Historian Edward Mead Earle brought scholars interested in the increasingly pressing questions of national security to a seminar in Princeton, where a broader view of the subject emerged. In his introduction to his landmark collection of essays, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, published in 1943, Earle explained that, narrowly defined, strategy was "the art of military command, of projecting and directing a campaign," where tactics was "the art of handling forces in battle." But war and society had "become more complicated," and so "strategy has of necessity required increasing consideration of nonmilitary factors, economic, psychological, moral, political, and technological." Strategy, therefore, was not "an inherent element of statecraft at all times." His definition tended toward grand strategy:

In the present-day world, then, strategy is the art of controlling and utilizing the

121 Michael Howard, "The Classic Strategists," *Problems of Modern Strategy*, ed. Alastair Buchan (London: Chatto & Windus for the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970), 47. He also opened with Liddell Hart in Michael Howard, "The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1979), 975-986. A reader for the National Defense University published in 1980, while including a rather long-winded definition of strategy from the Joint Chiefs, opened with Howard's essay and a number of extracts from Liddell Hart's book. Col. George Holt Jr. and Col. Walter Milliken, *Strategy: A Reader* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1980), iii. The Joint Chiefs' definition was: "the art and science of developing and using political, economic, psychological, and military forces as necessary during peace and war, to afford maximum support to policies, in order to increase the probabilities and favorable consequences of victory and to lessen the chances of defeat."

122 Raymond Aron, "The Evolution of Modern Strategic Thought," in Buchan, *Problems of Modern Strategy*, 14-15.

123 Hew Strachan, "The lost meaning of strategy," *Survival* 47, no. 3 (2005), 36.

124 "It is a singular feature of small wars that from the point of view of strategy the regular forces are upon the whole at a distinct disadvantage as compared to their antagonists." Col. C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (London: HMSO, 1896).

resources of a nation — or a coalition of nations — including its armed forces, to the end that its vital interests shall be effectively promoted and secured against enemies, actual, potential, or merely presumed.<sup>125</sup>

As Strachan pointed out in another article, the category of grand strategy was not always helpful because it suggested that it was in some way comparable to military strategy.<sup>126</sup> The original concept was closely connected to war and could be taken to refer to all of those things, including military preparations and action, required to prosecute war effectively. This included peacetime preparations for conflict, such as allocating military budgets and forming alliances. But these preparations might be undertaken in such a way that they made war unlikely (deterrence) and so, over time, could be hard to distinguish from a more general foreign and defense policy. Thus, just as strategy lost its specificity when it became unhinged from battle, so too did grand strategy lose its specificity as it became detached from war. Instead of discussions on strategy staying close to those on tactics they moved to a much higher plane.

In the period under discussion, an “operational level” was not identified.<sup>127</sup> A number of theorists did write about grand tactics, largely referring to the more demanding actions needed prior to actual battle, at which point ordinary tactics would come into play. Strategy itself best covered what is now considered the operational level, and the introduction of the latter can be seen as a response to the loss of a purely military definition of strategy.<sup>128</sup> These different categories — grand strategy/policy, strategy, grand tactics/operations, tactics — could be seen as representing different levels of command, and so serve as a way of delineating the responsibilities of each. But the issue was always the dynamic interaction between these distinct concepts, and the more categories, the more complicated that interaction became.

When strategy only entailed preparing for

battle, it was a chapter heading, a set of practical issues that any commander would need to address when moving large bodies of men, properly equipped and provisioned, into position for the coming encounter. Once battle was no longer the certain objective and the relationship between military means and political ends was opening up a range of operational possibilities, the topic of strategy became more challenging for purposes of officer education. But for the same reasons it also became much more interesting for theorists. Instead of looking to the past to help deduce the unchanging principles of war, strategy came to mean looking to the future to explore new ways in which changing political circumstances might interact with new forms of armed force. There is an unavoidable tension between strategy as theory, a way of thinking about the interplay of political and military affairs, and strategy as guidance, a way of preparing for likely contingencies. The first breaks down boundaries. The second requires boundaries to keep the task manageable. By the end of the 19th century, the study of strategy had become routine for practitioners, but of little interest for theorists. By the end of the 20th century, it had become a matter of endless fascination for theorists, but a puzzle for practitioners. 

**Lawrence Freedman** is professor emeritus of war studies at King’s College London. Freedman became professor of war studies at King’s College in 1982. In 2002, he became head of the School of Social Sciences and Public Policy at King’s College. In June 2009, he was appointed to serve as a member of the official inquiry into Britain and the 2003 Iraq War.

Before joining King’s College, Freedman held research appointments at Nuffield College Oxford, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. Elected a fellow of the British Academy in 1995, he was appointed official historian of the Falklands Campaign in 1997.

His most recent books are *Strategy: A History* (2013) and *The Future of War: A History* (2017).

125 Edward Meade Earle, “Introduction,” *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), viii. On Earle see Michael Finch, “Edward Mead Earle and the Unfinished Makers of Modern Strategy,” *Journal of Military History* 80, no. 3 (2016): 781–814; David Ekbladh, “Present at the Creation: Edward Mead Earle and the Depression Era Origins of Security Studies,” *International Security* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/12): 107–141.

126 Hew Strachan, “Strategy and Contingency,” *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2011): 1281–1296. Strachan’s writing on these issues were collected together in *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

127 Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan identify a reference in the 1982 Field Manual 100-5 to an “operational level of war,” which involved “planning and conducting campaigns” as the source of what they consider to be a major confusion. *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009). The idea, however, had already been introduced by Edward N. Luttwak, “The Operational Level of War,” *International Security* 5, no. 3 (Winter 1980–1981): 61–79.

128 Jean Colin saw grand tactics as having a place between strategy and tactics. Strategy was about the general control of operations. It “concerns itself with the combining of movements regulated so as to obtain a predetermined result.” Grand tactics concerns itself with the combined movements which prepare battle, and also organizes the march of divisions up to the point where they become engaged. Jean Colin, *The Transformations of War*, trans. Bvt. Maj. L.H.R. Pope-Hennessy (London: High Rees, 1912).

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