

# Introduction

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When the Cold War between West and East drew to a close in the early 1990s many believed, or perhaps hoped, that, in the new global order, conflict and violent confrontation between modern nations might be a thing of the past. There was even an expectation of a peace dividend which would result in those states damaged by the pressures and stresses of confronting the forces of communism, recovering, rebuilding and reinvesting resources to make good the price of victory, whilst the nations of the former Eastern bloc looked forward to a world in which they could determine their futures without the burden of heavy military expenditure and the spectre of war. For a time these highly optimistic views and hopes swept world opinion along, famously fuelled by Francis Fukuyama's infamous thesis about the conclusion of the Cold War and the end of history.<sup>1</sup> To those caught up in conflicts across the globe in the early 1990s such hollow triumphalism resonated with irony; indeed, in the midst of the celebrations, in Europe itself, a ghastly and brutal series of wars driven by nationalist politics, religion and race erupted in the Balkans which poisoned Europe's recovery for many years. On a wider scale, to those embroiled in long-running and bitter wars across the globe, the end of the confrontation between East and West impacted upon them little, in the short term at least.

Indeed, as we have journeyed into the twenty-first century human civilisation seems no closer to solving the problem of war and conflict. New threats to security have emerged, new enemies to confront, and warfare, in its many forms and guises, remains a part of the lives of the majority of the world's populations. Moreover, to some, the nature of warfare has degenerated and its ferocity intensified in modern times, ironically a direct consequence of the growth of capitalism and competition. Eric Hobsbawm pointed to an ongoing process of barbarisation of warfare since the nineteenth century fuelled by imperialism and the rise of the West, and thus, far from witnessing the end of history, we have merely seen change and not for the better: the world wars were followed by the Cold War, and then the 'war on terror'.<sup>2</sup> Arms trading with questionable states, the use of torture for intelligence gathering, and the rise of unrelenting extremism are viewed as manifestations of

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1 Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?' *The National Interest* (Summer, 1989); *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Free Press, 1992).

2 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Barbarism: A User's Guide', *New Left Review*, 206 (July–August 1994).

this downward spiral, exacerbated by the emergence of a multi-polar world and a plethora of new threats since the collapse of the Cold War.

This vision of an increasingly dissonant and insecure world is perhaps overly pessimistic when one considers the reality of the devastation and loss of life as a result of warfare in the twentieth century. Moreover, the view that warfare has degenerated is also open to question: that it has changed is not, as demonstrated by this volume. Atrocity and violence has been conditioned across history by capacity and need, and states, nations and groups have employed whatever measures necessary to achieve political objectives, even when driven by factors many would today regard as abhorrent or extreme. What perhaps remains a greater paradox is the divergence in the West between rhetoric and practice in attitudes to and the conduct of war; where one might have expected a rejection of certain forms of violence as modern states and societies have matured, we have in reality seen little change in the degree of conflict, even if its nature has modified.

In essence this volume aims to provide an opportunity for understanding and interpreting the many facets and manifestations of modern warfare, and how they have changed since the emergence of the industrial age. The manner in which land, sea and air forces have been deployed to fight conventional wars, and on occasion unconventional ones, remains the most obvious example of how warfare has been and will be fought, but the underpinning strategies behind these methods have been shaped by new approaches and interpretations in the modern era. Few Western perspectives on war are deemed legitimate without recourse to Clausewitz and many modern armed forces employ his writing to a greater or lesser extent in defining themselves, though the degree to which he is actually understood is questionable. Indeed, the ambiguities in interpreting Clausewitz are perhaps the very reasons his writing endures. Moreover, our understanding of warfare is reflected through the prism of Western attitudes and thought, which shape our understanding and interpretation of conflict. To some, John Keegan most famously, Clausewitzian philosophy cannot be disentangled from its Western roots and this, fused with the West's overtly technocentric, individualistic, libertarian and fiercely competitive nature, has shaped our attitudes to interpreting and understanding war in all its guises. Clearly, such views contrast sharply with those that argue for the universality of Clausewitz's philosophies.<sup>3</sup>

The conduct of war on land, sea and in the air, are pivotal aspects of how war has been fought and remain our most enduring manifestations of war. All three areas demonstrate how interstate warfare has changed radically and how all three areas need to be understood and integrated successfully into any strategy for the prosecution of a modern war. Sea and land warfare have become industrialised and, in parallel, increasingly shaped by technology, whilst air power has been largely defined by technological change and developments since its inception. Such reliance on production, machinery and technology has caused many changes

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3 John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London: Hutchinson, 1993); and Christopher Bassford, 'John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz: A Polemic', *War in History*, no. 4 (1994).

to the nature of warfare. Some have indeed argued that we have encountered a revolution in military affairs (RMA) in which the conduct of war has been driven increasingly by technological change, particularly in the field of intelligence and information. Command, control and communications have increasingly been determined by intelligence gathering and interpretation as the twentieth century has progressed; those who adopted modern approaches to the vital nature of intelligence tended to fair better. Indeed, states and armed forces, of all types and hue, have become so dependent on the movement and control of information that this itself has become a weakness to be targeted. The ultimate manifestation of this, though as yet unrealised, is the concept of cyberwar, an attack on a state's ability to interact with the world on virtual or electronic terms. It remains to be seen if this apocalyptic vision of conflict will emerge to the degree some have stated, or whether, as with many other revolutionary forms of warfare, the impact is lessened by countermeasures and other developments.

On land the conduct of war has become increasingly a product of management and organisation rather than simple tactical flair, though it took some time for this crucial factor to be fully appreciated in many armies. Well into the mid-twentieth century many armies considered warfare as being defined by combat in isolation from the politico-strategic environment. The transition away from semi-independent armies functioning largely in isolation from their governments and societies was driven by growing reliance on the home front to maintain the increasingly voracious appetite of armies for resources, and the development of communications networks, which allowed stakeholders such as governments and peoples to gain direct access to information.

This change also affected naval forces as centralised control became possible through radio, and the need for the latest cutting-edge warships made navies increasingly dependent on the support of state and society to fund such developments. The situation was exacerbated by the enhanced vulnerability of iron warships to modern gunfire, mines and torpedoes; in contrast it had always been harder to sink a wooden sailing ship with cannon. The relevance of naval strength was also threatened by the supposed decline in value of maritime power, driven by the growth in continental industry and transport networks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, the emergence of air power provided a real threat to the viability of warships from the moment of the Mitchell trials in 1921 to the crushing blows delivered at Taranto and Pearl Harbor in 1940 and 1941 respectively. Yet sea power proved adaptable and flexible, and was fundamental to success in both world wars and crucial in the Cold War. In the contemporary world, in the likely absence of nuclear threats, naval forces provide obvious political and diplomatic statements of intent, alongside effective conventional power projection.

Air power has provided the most radical change to the dynamics of the conduct of war in the modern age. Air forces have seriously altered the battlefield by adding a third dimension, both on land and at sea, and by World War II aircraft could seriously compromise an enemy lacking the means to resist in the skies over the battlefield. By the 1990s technological development even seemed to have

produced the ability for a state to win a war without recourse to ground forces, though this remains contested. Air power has also extended the reach of warfare in a direct physical sense by bringing civilians into the sphere of combat and has greatly expanded the capacity of major industrial and technological powers, most obviously the USA, to impose their will by distant means. What took weeks in the nineteenth century through the use of naval forces now takes hours, or even minutes, with the application of air power and the power relationship between modern states wielding air forces and those resisting them has changed as a result, fuelling moves towards the adoption of guerrilla and insurgency strategies.

The greatest challenge confronting all armed forces, but perhaps land forces most pertinently, has been insurgencies and people's war. Armies have long been structured and conditioned to winning conventional interstate wars, yet in the post-Cold War world much military action has been in the field of counterinsurgency warfare, peacekeeping and peace implementation, and the ongoing adaptation has proved painful and difficult. Nevertheless, armed forces have still struggled with this change and force structures still largely reflect the historical baggage carried by the services.

Terrorism, insurgency warfare and air attack have all brought the civilian directly into the realm of physical combat to a degree hitherto unknown, simultaneous with the growing requirement for modern war to be supported and facilitated by the societies from which armed forces are drawn. Indeed reliance on populations, economies, scientists and states has become essential, increasingly so in the age of total war (c. 1916–1945) and since. Harnessing a nation's resources, managing them effectively and productively, and shaping the will of a nation through control of how warfare is understood, have become vital to modern interstate wars; those states which managed this process more successfully tended to win, whilst those which did not, often failed. Harnessing or deploying all of a nation's resources and the incorporation of all parts of society into warfare has precipitated a shift in the gender balance of war. Prior to the twentieth century women were allowed in generally patriarchal Western societies only peripheral roles in warfare, but with the expansion of the electoral franchise, heightened popular nationalism and the increasing need for labour in war industries, women were drawn much further into the sphere of war. By World War II the experience and place of women in war had changed dramatically through mobilisation and identification with war aims, and in the latter half of the twentieth-century women were integrating in greater numbers into professional armed forces, though not without much anguished debate; traditional armed forces have rarely been noted for their progressive thinking on social issues. To the consternation of many in male-oriented services, females now play an increasingly important role in warfare, even to the extent of front-line combat.

In part this has been driven by the increasing costs of training and maintaining military personnel derived from societies reluctant to surrender themselves to the excesses of war; in this situation women provide a further pool for recruitment. In addition, pressures on personnel resources and costs have been eased by the growth of private security firms, which can provide, in theory, a reasonable

level of moderate-to-low security at lower cost than deploying highly trained military personnel. There are, of course, considerable questions to be asked of such organisations and the concept sits uncomfortably with human rights groups and monitors, but it can be seen to be a consequence of the high levels of training and increasingly high-cost technology employed in armed forces impacting upon numbers.

The increasing reliance on technology and industry to provide the needs of resource hungry armed forces has fuelled the development of arms industries across the globe, but particularly in the US, UK, France, Russia and China, and these in turn have sought markets for weapons and arms technologies beyond their own national borders. This trade began to flourish during the Cold War as the superpowers endeavoured to increase pressure on each other through client states, which in turn required weapons bought from their backers, be they East or West. Since the collapse of the USSR the trade has not diminished and in response to burgeoning threats from terrorist groups, insurgents and instability, weapons manufacturers have continued to win high-cost export contracts, and provide income and employment in their home states. Despite reservations about the politics and morals of the end-users of some of these arms deals, few in Western regimes have challenged or actively sought to curtail the industry.

The first time the phrase ‘media war’ was heard was during the First Gulf War in the weeks after the US and its allies initiated Operation Desert Storm back in 1991. It was, as Stephen Badsey writes in this volume, coined to reflect a new adversarial relationship between the media and the Western armed forces. Fighting a ‘media war’ is not, of course, about the armed forces waging a war against the national or international media establishments but about the systematic attempts by the military to influence, dictate and ultimately exploit the news media agenda in order to achieve military victory on the battlefield and away from it in the context of public diplomacy and public opinion. The key questions here are: Where are the lines drawn? When does it become propaganda rather than news? In the case of the First Gulf War, after the war was over 17 of the major US news organisations, including the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and others protested to the then Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney against the ‘real censorship’ during the war which confirmed ‘the worst fears of reporters in a democracy’.<sup>4</sup>

The arrival of new technologies and changes in telecommunication have made journalism more intrusive, faster and to a certain degree independent from military logistics. It has also led to new methods, purposes and technologies of warfare. In an information age that has now become global, digital and instantaneous, fighting also takes place with email, blogs, instant-messaging digital cameras, and the Internet; non-state actors somewhat inevitably have also adapted and are able to use media and communications as their own ‘battle space’. The attacks on New York and Washington in 9/11 illustrated the significance of this new global information battle space. For the jihadists, having understood only too well the utility of twenty-first-century media and communications in their campaign, they

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4 See *The New York Times* (3 July 1991).

were waging not only asymmetric strikes against the US but also a sophisticated information assault. 'More than half of this battle', Osama bin Laden's chief lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri declared soon after the attack, 'is taking place on the battlefield of the media ...'.

One of Osama bin Laden's intentions back in 2001 surely must have been to portray the West as emotionally vulnerable, over-reactive, decadent and hypocritical about liberal values. The West has done a very good job in the years following 9/11 of proving him right. The invasion of Iraq, the images of torture and the widely documented abuse of prisoners at Guantanamo and other US facilities left the US reviled not only in the Arab world but throughout the West, undercutting the moral authority which is vital for any democracy in dealing effectively with persistent national security threats.

Excesses in wars have always been commonplace; armies, both invading and occupying, have always behaved badly. The Belgians in Congo, the French in Algeria, the Germans, Russians and Japanese during the Second World War, the British in Kenya; even the Dutch during the colonial wars committed atrocities and practised torture and sexual humiliation on despised, recalcitrant natives. But most did it before the age of the digital pocket camera. Images like the photograph of naked Iraqi prisoners cowering in front of barking dogs in Abu Ghraib have forced us to come face-to-face with warfare's undiminished brutality and indiscriminate excess. Be that as it may, at the start of the twenty-first century, we should not be debating the use of torture. Questions such as whether torture works and whether the Geneva conventions still hold should not have become central moral issues of our age. It falls outside the parameters of this introduction to provide an analysis of whether or not the occupation of Iraq turned out – to use the words of the liberal American magazine *The Nation* – to be a morally corrosive imperial adventure but it needs to be said that the sight of Americans torturing Iraqis in the same prison that Saddam Hussein used to torture Iraqis destroyed the credibility of the assumption that American and British troops would help to build a stable, representative democracy that respected human rights and the rule of law. Now that the truth about the hidden prisons and the beatings and the torture chambers has come out, we can no longer identify so easily the moral differences between Saddam's regime and the rule of the American and British militaries which followed.

As Cofer Black, the one-time director of the CIA's counter-terrorist unit, put it in testimony to Congress in early 2002, there was 'a before 9/11 and an after 9/11'. The problem stems in part from a moral equivalent that emerged after the events of 9/11 when America found itself under attack by a brutal, amorphous enemy which would go to extraordinary lengths and use whatever means it could to destroy the West. Former president George Bush would repeatedly declare that we were 'in a different kind of war'. Yet, however 'different' that war was going to be, universal (and American) values required that civilised standards be maintained. A country as powerful as the United States had many choices, even when struck by a blow as heavy as that of 9/11. Playing fast and loose with international law and the norms of civilised behaviour as the Bush administration chose to do after 9/11 was always going to be a self-defeating strategy. In its casual disregard for international public

opinion and cavalier approach to human rights, the United States damaged not only the nation's moral standing but, more crucially, undermined the very values that the war against both 'terror' and al-Qaeda was supposed to encourage. Francis Fukuyama may have exaggerated in the past with his 'end of history' assertions but he hardly did when he wrote that the world's perception of [George Bush's] America's image was no longer the Statue of Liberty but the hooded prisoner and Abu Ghraib.

When morality vanishes from the battlefield, a war can never be won. It does not really matter a great deal whether you choose to call this kind of treatment abuse or some other euphemism, the fact remains that torture, like any other atrocity, lives on in the minds of the tortured. And, as any abused prisoner at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo or Bagram will tell you, every time a person is reduced to a howling beast by deliberately inflicted pain, our civilisation crumbles a little more, until in the end there will only be barbarism. Because the maltreatment of detainees and 'terrorists' dehumanises not just those who man the cages and take the callous photos, but also the societies in whose name the cages and gaols were built. The Abu Ghraib snapshots and the hundreds of prisoners held beyond the rule of law in Guantanamo, Bagram and Diego Garcia tell us that despite the profound and largely positive sociocultural changes that have taken place in Western society since 1914, barbarity, atrocity and torture still loom large. What links twentieth-century warfare with the current history of conflict in the 'war against terror' is the notion that warfare is a state of being, not a state of conflict. People do have a choice, even if they have opted to march into battle. In the same way there are just wars and unjust wars, forms of killing that are necessary and forms that shame us all, there are human and inhuman warriors.

Reflecting on Raymond Aron's insight that what matters most in a modern war is the way it is fought, 'the battle in and for itself', the principal aim of the essays which follow in this collection is to take a fresh look at key issues in modern warfare, not only in terms of the conduct of war and the wider complexities and ramifications of modern conflict but also of concepts of war, the crucial shifts in the structure of warfare and the utility, morality and legality of the use of force in a post-9/11 age. Ultimately, it is intended that the chapters will provide provocative, enlightening and thought-provoking studies and introductions to the key issues, concepts, strategies and dilemmas that have confronted and continue to confront those engaged in the conduct and process of war in the modern world.