1 Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, people fortunate enough to live in Western societies are probably more secure than at any point in the twentieth century. No system of alliances currently creates a mechanism of international obligations that might trigger a war in the way that European alliances triggered the First World War. An almost universal consensus on the values of liberal democracy and the free market means that no totalitarian ideology is threatening to bury the Western way of life in the way that fascism did in the Second World War and communism during the Cold War. Not only are there fewer political reasons for conflict at the beginning of the twenty-first century, but the military means, such as nuclear weapons, for fighting these conflicts are no longer on the hair-trigger alert that was maintained during the Cold War. Today it is hard for schoolchildren to imagine that their grandparents were taught to 'duck and cover' or that their parents worried about whether Russians loved their children enough not to want to unleash nuclear Armageddon. Thus, measured by the standards of the twentieth century, we are safer than we have ever been. However, the standards by which we measure our security have changed.

To understand the way today's measurement of danger differs from the twentieth century it is useful to distinguish between threats and risks.[1] A threat is a specific danger which can be precisely identified and measured on the basis of the capabilities an enemy has to realise a hostile intent. During the Cold War the Soviet Union with the Red Army's tanks and nuclear missiles constituted such a threat. The Soviet

[1] The distinction between threat and risk appears in many forms in the risk literature (Luhmann, for instance, writes about risk vs security and risk vs danger), but the main point is the distinction between a modern concept of computable dangers (threat) and a late modern, reflexive concept of risk. See Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 52–8, Niklas Luhmann, *Risk: A Sociological Theory*, trans. Rhodes Barrett (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 1–31 and Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 124–31.

threat could be assessed in terms of the Kremlin's ends and the means the Soviet Union had at its disposal to realise these ends. That did not mean that politicians or researchers agreed on the nature of the Soviet threat, but they debated the threat in terms of what could be measured in the belief that it was possible to defeat the threat and achieve security. Thus threats were understood in a means-end rational framework. This reflected the nature of the danger, but it was also the result of a process that began in the seventeenth century when modern strategy began to place warfare in a means-end rational context.

Today the Red Army is gone and the West faces the new dangers of a globalising world. Terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are often-mentioned examples of this, but the introduction of new military technologies, the advent of new great powers and the introduction of new doctrines for the use of armed force should also be mentioned. This strategic agenda is about 'risks' rather than threats. From a risk perspective a danger is much less computable than from a threat perspective. A risk is a scenario followed by a policy proposal for how to prevent this scenario from becoming real. However, such a policy proposal does not aim to achieve perfect security: from a risk perspective the best one can hope for is to manage or pre-empt a risk; one can never achieve perfect security because new risks will arise as a 'boomerang effect' of defeating the original risk.

Where strategic studies have clearly defined the nature of threats, the nature of strategy in a time of risk has not yet been codified and placed in a system which can help researchers and the public to understand the dangers of the twenty-first century and help policy-makers to act upon these dangers. If one studies the practice of security policy since the end of the Cold War, however, the outline of the new risk rationality of strategy emerges. This book seeks to describe this new rationality of strategy.

Strategy is not the only field where 'risk' is redefining the terms of policy-making. A number of sociologists – Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, John Adams and Niklas Luhmann foremost among them – use the term 'risk society' to describe how the citizens of Western countries have come to see their society's development as 'a theme and a problem for itself'.[2] It is the argument of this book that the emergence of the risk society has profound consequences for how Western societies measure how secure they are, and that 'risk-thinking' – or 'reflexive rationality' as the sociologists prefer to call it – is shaping the strategies by which

[2] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 8.

Western governments seek to achieve security. In risk society there is no such thing as perfect security. Thinking in terms of risk means measuring the present in terms of the future – and from the perspective of the first years of the twenty-first century, there is plenty to fear from the future.

Although the West is not faced with a hostile balance of power, threatening new actors are appearing on the strategic horizon. Al-Qaeda is widely regarded as the first example of a new breed of strategic agents, who are able to operate because globalisation makes the world easily accessible to terrorists as well as traders. In time, other groups may follow al-Qaeda's example and form transnational terrorist networks. These networks may form coalitions with other non-state actors or with states, thus creating a new type of 'hostile coalition' that may produce conflict even though the balance of power between states may continue to be benign. Forming coalitions with non-state actors may also be a way for revisionist states to destabilise the balance of power in their favour. Furthermore, al-Qaeda is often presented as an example of a new ideological challenge to Western society. It is a challenge different from that posed by fascism or communism, however, because Western politicians and publics believe al-Qaeda to be of a different rationality than they are – these terrorists act because of their religious beliefs, not any national interests.

The confrontation with terrorism demonstrates how information and communication technologies have revolutionised the way the West, especially the United States, wages war. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the US armed forces have shown the effectiveness of a military machine with a global reach. However, they have also demonstrated that this 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA) is not living up to the promise of clean, fast and unproblematic wars. Instead of perfecting war, technological innovation is opening up new possibilities for warfare, which in all likelihood will change warfare in the twenty-first century.

Technological innovations, the rise of new types of enemy and the way they are seen to challenge Western values define the strategic environment in the twenty-first century. To many people, the collapse of the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, following al-Qaeda's attack on New York and Washington, is an iconic image that summarises the fears of a new age. While schoolchildren may no longer fear nuclear Armageddon, they do ask teachers and parents about the possibility of another 9/11. Children might return reassured to the playground once they have been told that the likelihood of a terrorist attack in their neighbourhood is small. And compared to the threats that Polish children faced in 1939 or American children faced during the Cuban Missile

Crisis in 1962, our children have little to fear. While this argument may reassure children, it does not seem to work on their parents because comparisons to the threats of the past do not work in a society that defines itself in terms of risk. 'Risks are not "real", they are "becoming real"', Joost van Loon notes.[3] In the twentieth century, threats were regarded like stocks: they were measurable and finite. One could count the number of Waffen SS divisions and defeat them in battle, or measure the number of Soviet nuclear warheads and deploy an equal number as a deterrent. Risks are flows. When assessing a risk, what matters is not so much what happens but what may happen, because, van Loon goes on, 'as soon as risks become real, say an act of terrorism destroying the financial heart of New York, they cease to be risks and become a catastrophe or at least an irritation. Risks have already moved elsewhere: to the anticipation of further attacks, economic decline or worldwide war.'[4]

A risk is a scenario followed by a policy proposal for how to prevent this scenario from becoming real. For this reason, a success cannot be measured with any degree of finality because success depends on creating a reality different from what one feared would happen. However, if one prevents a scenario from becoming real, the result will probably be to create new risks, which then rise to the top of the agenda. The theoretical outcome of this process is that risks are infinite because they multiply over time since one can always do more to prevent them from becoming real. Following 9/11, security specialists began to focus on society's vulnerability to further terrorist attacks. It soon became apparent that the non-specific nature of risk means that anything, anywhere is at risk. Since risks are infinite while government resources are not, the central feature of dealing with the new risks is judgement. Policy-makers must choose which risks they most need to prevent and which they have to accept. Discussing their judgement requires a debating culture based on premises very different from the premises of the national security debates during the Cold War.

Does the fact that Western societies regard strategic danger in terms of risk show that the world has become dominated by risk-type dangers, thus necessitating a risk world-view to make sense of it all; or is it the case that it is the world-view of Western societies that has changed, the world itself having changed little? In other words, is risk a social construction or a rational response? In the risk literature there is a great

[3] Joost van Loon, *Risk and Technological Culture: Towards a Sociology of Virulence* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.
[4] Ibid.

deal of debate about precisely this question.[5] It should be noted that this debate is not really about the actual analysis of present Western society, but rather how this analysis should be carried out. Of course, one should be a little suspicious when the answer to a question does not really have consequences. Perhaps the question is being asked in the wrong way. In fact, I believe that the question of 'world' vs 'world-view' can be resolved if one approaches it less philosophically and more sociologically. Thus I suggest studying risk as a form of rationality.

Max Weber defined rationality in terms of the way actions make sense to the agents who carry them out. 'For Weber one type of action is distinguished from another by the meanings which the actors themselves attach to their actions,' Ann Swidler explains, 'rather than the objective characteristics of an action as they would be seen by an outside observer.'[6] Thus in Swidler's reading of Weber, rationality defines the idea of action. Doing certain things makes sense only because a given rationality defines the means, ends or values according to which you act. Perhaps Weber's most famous example of how rationality defines the idea of action is how means-end rationality makes bureaucracy work. The way bureaucrats deal with the morning post, conduct meetings, inform their ministers, draft laws and answer citizens' letters makes sense only because of the means-end rationality of the way the rules of bureaucratic procedure are defined. Without bureaucracy, government would be much simpler – for those who govern, at least. There is no inherent need for a government to go through all these elaborate procedures in order to govern, but government makes sense to the bureaucrat and is legitimate in modern society only if it is conducted with regard to means-end rationality.

Modern Western society has been shaped by how bureaucratisation has introduced means-end rationality into both public administration and business, as well as by how industrialisation has transformed modes of production, a process of modernisation that is also apparent in the strategic realm. The concept of strategy created a means-end rational approach to the use of armed force. Strategy came into being in the seventeenth century as a way of making sense of guns. How were guns

[5] For a social constructivist approach to the study of risk, see François Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 199. In *World Risk Society*, Ulrich Beck seems to argue that the new rationality is a reaction to the realities of risk society. Later, he insists that one can approach risk from a social constructivist as well as a realist position, 133–52.

[6] Ann Swidler, 'The Concept of Rationality in the Work of Max Weber', *Sociological Inquiry* 43 (1973), 38.

and muskets to be used in battle, and how were armies to be organised in order to utilise this new technology fully? Strategy was to make sense of this 'revolution in military affairs' by linking it to the development of the modern state. The new military technologies were to be put to use by the governments of the new sovereign states. Carl von Clausewitz famously defined warfare as the use of armed force as a means of politics. From this perspective, strategy is the modern idea of what going to war is all about. Strategy makes sense of the relationship between the technologies by means of which wars are fought, and of the doctrines that define the aims of the campaigns and the nature of the enemies one fights. Since precisely which technologies are useful and who is being fought have changed a number of times since the seventeenth century, strategy has become a means of continuously rationalising the use of armed force in order to identify the technologies, doctrines and agents that constitute either a source of insecurity or a means to security.

Thus, if one regards strategy as a form of rationality, it soon becomes apparent that this definition of the relationship between technologies, doctrines and agents is a creation of modern Western society, such that when Western society changes, so does the idea of armed force. Today the idea of using armed force is changing because Western society has adopted a new risk rationality that fits the new kind of global modernity and the new kinds of threats that globalisation is creating. Focusing on strategy as a part of social development allows one to look at 'strategies' other than military strategy. This is important because the creation of a risk society has led to a proliferation of strategic practices. Businessmen have strategies, and countless self-help books suggest strategies for a better life. These and other strategic practices inspire governments to draw up security strategies in new ways. As we shall see, there are clear parallels between the 'precautionary principle' used in environmental policy and doctrines of pre-emption such as those advocated by President Bush.

The similarity between certain aspects of environmental policy and strategy is one example of how studying strategy as a form of rationality makes it possible to link current policy debates on a number of civilian issues with strategic theory and the future of strategic practice. Stephen Kalberg notes that Weber used rationality to 'guide him to critical historical watersheds':[7] rationality is used in this book for precisely that purpose. The concept of risk as the new guiding principle of strategy makes it possible to connect a number of events, policy initiatives and

[7] Stephen Kalberg, 'Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History', *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (1980), 1,172.

technological developments, which would otherwise seem random and unconnected. The Iraq war, the revolution in military affairs, terrorism, pre-emptive doctrines and the increased legalisation of warfare are not isolated incidents and developments, but part of a new concept and practice of strategy. This is especially important since more traditional strategic studies are right to point out that many, if not most, of the elements of today's strategy are the same as those that prevailed during the twentieth century. However, the risk framework allows one to see how these well-known elements are being put together in a new way with the addition of other elements that are peculiar to the twenty-first century.

Rationality offers a new approach to strategy, and the study of strategic rationality helps to explain the curious fact that most studies of strategy are not really interested in how technology, terrorism and other factors are reshaping the strategic environment. Most definitions of strategy, as well as most students of strategic studies who are using them to analyse contemporary issues, regard strategy as a function of political ends and military means. The idea of using armed force is believed to have been defined once and for all by Clausewitz. The nature of politics and armed force is regarded as a given, a universal condition that is valid for all societies, governments and groups at all times. The concept of strategy also involves establishing a clear hierarchy of issues, saying what is important and what is not. The topics of terrorism and technology are not very high on that list. Mainstream strategic studies do not dismiss their temporary importance, nor do they refrain from analysing them, but most realist students of strategic studies (probably the largest group of researchers within the discipline) carefully emphasise that terrorism, technological innovation and related issues are not creating a new strategic reality: they are merely an interlude until the threats that made the twentieth century dangerous return. However, while academics wait, policy-makers are busy dealing with new strategic challenges in new ways. In doing so, they are defining a new strategic rationality that renders many, if not most, of the traditional strategic maxims irrelevant.

In focusing on rationality, this book does *not* ask why, for example, the US government decided to invade Iraq in 2003. Instead, I ask how US decision-makers arrived at the idea that invading Iraq would make the United States more secure; and I also ask how the invasion made sense – or not – to the American public and world public opinion, how the Iraq war utilised new technologies and how the idea of the war was framed by pre-emptive doctrines. In other words, this is a study of strategic ideas rather than specific policies or interests. As such, this book is about the context and consequences of actions rather than the actions themselves.

This means that the technological expert, the international lawyer or anyone meticulously noting the latest newspaper 'revelation' about what went on in Prime Minister Blair's or President Bush's cabinet in the run-up to the Iraq war might find some of the arguments superficial. While no author likes to disappoint his readers, my aim in writing this book has been to describe the development of a new strategic rationality. This means connecting and comparing a number of issues, such comparisons necessarily being more superficial than specific case studies.

The book begins by arguing the case for studying strategy in terms of rationality. In Chapter 2, the history of the concept of strategy is outlined in order to argue that the history of strategy is a history of rationality. Since the early modern period, strategy has been a way of rationalising technologies, doctrines and agents in order for strategists to guide governments on how to deal with security issues. A pivotal figure in the history of strategy is Carl von Clausewitz, who turned his experience of 'total war' during the Napoleonic wars into an analysis of the means-end rationality of modern war. Clausewitz' definition of warfare is still the guiding star of strategic studies, but the practice of warfare in the early twenty-first century is increasingly escaping means-end rational explanations. Thus the chapter offers a critique of the basic assumptions of mainstream strategic studies and suggests that studying strategy in terms of risk rationality is one way to make strategic studies more relevant to contemporary issues.

In the second chapter, three characteristics of a reflexive rationality for dealing with risk are presented. These three characteristics – management, the presence of the future and the boomerang effect – are used for structuring the analysis of the rest of the book. The following chapters deal with one of the building blocks of strategy in turn – first technology, then doctrines and finally agents. In each chapter, the three characteristics of risk politics are used to structure the analysis, in order to demonstrate the explanatory power of risk theory and to show that individual elements of strategy are subject to similar considerations. This serves to show that risk is not merely relevant for a single element of strategy (doctrines, for example), but that risk politics changes strategy as such.

Chapter 3 is about technology. 'Military transformation', or the 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA), is high on Western military agendas, but most researchers treat transformation as a technical issue. While the technology itself may be a technical issue that is rather too complicated for social scientists, the RMA is very much a social phenomenon, since it is a narrative of change and risk which provides a means of rationalising new technologies in ways that make them manageable for

policy-makers. Thinking of military force in terms of the RMA means defining military capabilities in terms of technology trends, that is, in terms of future capabilities that have not yet been developed. It also means defining the capabilities of friends and foes in relation to their stake in the future RMA. From this perspective, one might regard the RMA as the culmination of a process that began with the introduction of gunpowder weapons in the seventeenth century. As already noted, strategy began as a way of rationalising these new technologies; now the latest military technologies offer a means of perfecting the means-end rational approach to warfare. Information and communication technologies promise near-perfect information about the battlefield, thus making it possible to apply the right means to the right ends. However, although the perfect battle may be possible, the perfect war is not. One boomerang effect of the RMA is that the Western ability to design battles leads to 'asymmetrical strategies'. Another is the fact that the increased amounts of information which the RMA provides make Western societies believe that they can fight clean and cost-free wars. Thus the RMA may actually make Western societies more prone to use armed force, as well as more vulnerable to casualties when they do use it. The RMA makes it easier to fight wars, but harder to justify the death and destruction that wars still bring. Defeating a Western RMA force is thus a matter of imposing as many risks as possible on this force by running high risks oneself. Western forces can prevail in such a contest of risk-taking only by showing their willingness to accept casualties. The result is not more rational and cleaner warfare, but rather what two perceptive Chinese colonels term 'unrestricted warfare'.

Chapter 4 is about doctrines, by which I mean the fundamental principles that guide the use of armed force. The fundamental principle that is the focus of this chapter is the concept of pre-emption. This is as old as warfare itself, but as an idea which should guide strategy it gained, depending on one's point of view, fame or notoriety during the 2002 debates about the invasion of Iraq. President Bush argued that the United States could not remain secure in a globalising world if it did not pre-empt threats. This argument is surprisingly similar to that used by environmentalists when arguing for the precautionary principle. This illustrates that the strategic agenda has become much more like 'normal' policy areas than it used to be. Military strategy has actually been rather slow in adopting pre-emptive doctrines. The chapter thus shows how environmental policy and crime control have become dominated by such doctrines. When it comes to military strategy, however, the problems of the burden of proof and democratic legitimacy that haunt pre-emptive principles in other policy areas become acute. It is very difficult to

produce mechanisms to make governments accountable for the judgements they make about when risks are so great that they need to be pre-empted. Judgement is the central concept in this discussion. Policy-makers have to judge whether to act on a risk on the basis of scenarios that present the risks involved in acting as well as in not acting. Only if parliaments are careful to define benchmarks by which to judge such actions are they able to maintain democratic control of strategy while leaving room for the executive to operate in an unpredictable environment.

Chapter 5 is about agents. Strategic studies traditionally regard armed conflict as an activity between states or state-like units. When Clausewitz defined war as a means of politics, he meant that war was an instrument of the state. In the early twenty-first century, this principle describes an increasingly smaller part of the strategic practice that Western governments engage in. This chapter thus seeks to unpack the notion of agency. Clausewitz defined war in terms of politics and politics in terms of the state, thus providing the same answer ('the state') to the questions of 'who is waging war?', 'who is allowed to wage war?', 'who are they waging war against?' and 'how do the soldiers waging war regard their own role?' Separating these questions, it becomes apparent that they cannot all be answered with 'the state' any longer. In fact, the areas of armed conflict still defined in terms of the state have been so tightly regulated by what I term 'the UN approach' to warfare that great-power war is no longer a legitimate means of changing the international order. This 'bureaucratisation of warfare' challenges the basic premise of many modern writings on strategy, namely that states conduct international politics in the knowledge that they can ultimately resort to war. Not only are international law and international organisations playing a more important part in defining the legitimate means and ends of war, but Western societies no longer expect to be fighting wars against only other states. Answering the question of who they may fight, they no longer answer 'states like us', because that is forbidden, but increasingly see their enemies as different in organisation and rationality. Al-Qaeda is both a symbol and a potent example of this new type of enemy. It is an interesting fact about risk societies that they not only fear their enemies but also fear identifying them, because identifying an enemy opens up new and unforeseen boomerang effects in a world where social groupings of any kind are connected in new and numerous ways across state borders. Identifying enemies and fighting them are widely regarded as risks, but it is a risk that some people in risk societies are willing to embrace. Most writings on Western attitudes to war focus on the 'post-heroic' nature of contemporary Western society and therefore