Introduction to the second edition

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Contents

This book focuses on modern warfare. It examines the conduct of war in its different environments and forms and provides an introduction to the issues, ideas, concepts, context and vocabulary necessary to develop an understanding of the subject. It is not a history book, although relevant historical examples are used throughout to illustrate the analysis. Rather, the book is designed to equip the reader with a sophisticated introduction to the concepts, issues and debates that will help them to understand current concerns and future possibilities and also to unpick past campaigns.

This subject is an important one. War and warfare have had a pervasive and often a pernicious influence on human affairs throughout history. Optimistic claims that we are evolving towards a less violent international system do not appear to be entirely borne out by recent events. Despite this, the conduct of war as an academic field of enquiry is not a subject that everyone is comfortable with. It requires one to study a phenomenon that many disapprove of and to think about things that some prefer to ignore. That such study is often encouraged or supported by armed forces eager to derive 'lessons' intended to improve future performance has done little to endear it to liberal academics. Insofar as they study war at all most Western universities prefer to focus on 'war and society', examining the impact that war has had on wider society rather than focusing explicitly on warfare. The result has been a demilitarisation of the topic within much of academia, what Michael Howard called a 'flight to the suburbs'.[1] This is not a suburban book. It self-consciously focuses on the central activity of armed forces and on the urban centre of the subject, on warfare. It does so in recognition that this does not address the totality of war, which is about more than just warfare, but is based on the notion that one cannot understand modern war unless one also understands modern warfare.

The book is also based on the judgement that such understanding is important. To paraphrase Sun Tzu, the conduct of war is of such importance, quite literally the province of life and death, it is vital that it be studied carefully. It

should never be forgotten that wars always result in death, destruction, waste and human suffering, all too frequently on a truly staggering scale. Unfortunately, ignoring the phenomenon is unlikely to make it go away and to do so fosters ignorance of something that has had, and continues to have, a major impact on human affairs. Whether one wishes to avoid warfare, to mitigate its impact or to prepare to conduct it more efficiently (and these are not mutually exclusive positions) it is important that it be studied. Indeed, one might suggest that in a democracy in the twenty-first century it is particularly important that as wide a range of people as possible should understand the nature of modern warfare in order that they are equipped to make intelligent judgements about the way in which their own governments seek to employ military force. The requirement for military personnel to understand warfare should be too obvious to require further elaboration given the historical correlation between ignorance and military incompetence.

What is war?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, war is a 'hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state'.[2] More succinctly, Hedley Bull, the renowned scholar of international relations, described war as 'organised violence carried on by political units against each other'.[3] Other definitions distinguish between armed conflict and war. These tend to focus on the scale and degree of violence employed, suggesting that 'wars' are characterised by large numbers of combatants, heavy casualties and/or high-intensity fighting. The Correlates of War project, for example, defines war as involving sustained combat by organised armed forces resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related deaths between combatants in any given year. The Uppsala Conflict Database Project, on the other hand, focuses on 'armed conflict' defined as a 'contested incompatibility' involving at least twenty-five battle-related deaths within a year.[4] The collection and use of quantifiable data clearly poses some methodological challenges and the shortcomings of either definition are readily apparent. Is it really the case that a terrorist campaign that kills twenty-five people within twelve months is indicative of an armed conflict but one that kills twenty-four is not? Does a conflict really cease to be a war simply because the casualty figures slip below 1,000 in any given year? Such definitions tell us little about the nature or the character of war; they are best recognised for what they are, simply a means of gathering and handling data.

Other approaches focus on legal issues, identifying 'war' as a state of law that regulates armed conflict between groups, usually states. These reflect the conventional understanding of war, as articulated in international law and treaties, as organised rule-bounded violence conducted between the uniformed representatives of states. They tend to exclude the activities of sub-state groups whose use of violence is not given the credibility or legitimacy associated with the

Box (i) Defining war

Carl von Clausewitz (1832): 'War is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.'[1]

L. F. L. Oppenheim (1906): 'War is a contention between two or more states through their armed forces, for the purpose of overpowering each other and imposing such conditions of peace as the victor pleases.'[2]

Mao Zedong (1938): 'Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed.'[3]

Quincy Wright (1942): '[War is] a legal condition which equally permits two or more hostile groups to carry on a conflict by armed force.'[4]

Hedley Bull (1977): '[War is] organised violence carried on by political units against each other'.[5]

Colin Gray (2005): 'War is organised violence threatened or waged for political purposes.'[6]

US Joint Doctrine (2013): 'War is socially sanctioned violence to achieve a political purpose.'[7]

[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton University Press, 1976 [1832]), p. 99.
[2] Quoted in Lawrence Freedman, 'Defining War', in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of War* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 19.
[3] *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 226–7.
[4] Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, vol. II (University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 685.
[5] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 178.
[6] Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 30.
[7] Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States (2013), pp. 1–2.

term. Given that, thus far into the twenty-first century, most armed conflict has occurred either between sub-state groups or between such groups and conventional militaries, such definitions, while logically coherent, may be too restrictive. For the purposes of this book Bull's more expansive approach seems more satisfactory (see Box (i)).

Contemporary Western approaches to war are profoundly influenced by the work of Carl von Clausewitz whose posthumous *magnum opus*, *On War*, published in 1832, stated that war is 'an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will . . . a clash of major interests, which is resolved by bloodshed'. Famously, Clausewitz emphasised the political nature of war, stressing that 'war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means', a statement that is as widely known as it is frequently misquoted. Far from advocating war as an alternative to politics he intended to show that war was driven by politics and could only be understood in that context. The means of waging war can never be considered in isolation from the aim that they are designed to support. As Clausewitz put it, '[w]ar may have its own grammar, but not its own logic. The logic is determined by the political aim.'[5] Logic and grammar may collide, often with unfortunate consequences.

Not everyone views war in this way, a point that was emphasised by Anatol Rapoport in his introduction to an abridged edition of Clausewitz's work published by Penguin. Rapoport identified that not all people or groups viewed war as political or approached it in the rational and instrumental manner described in *On War*.[6] More recently, authors such as Mary Kaldor have argued that Clausewitz's approach is less useful within the context of so-called 'new wars', where there may be no formal government, no clear political objectives and where many of the combatants may fight because they enjoy it or because it gives them access to the things that they value; they may have no interest in military victory in the traditional sense.[7] On the other hand, one might argue that even self-serving warlords have aims, even if these are associated with the continuation of the current conflict. For them violence is indeed a tool of policy, even if that policy bears little relation to those traditionally adopted by states. It may well be the case that, as Kaldor and others have argued, some of those engaged in war are motivated by cultural imperatives or even perhaps by a non-rational urge to fight, but this does not mean that the conflict in which they participate is not directed towards some end. These ends may involve the achievement of wealth, security or prestige; they may be profoundly influenced by culture, identify, religion and/or ideology; and may be poorly defined or even barely understood, but they do exist. It seems fair to suggest that war remains political, in the sense that it is pursued in support of some or other policy, even if that policy involves the pursuit of goals that appear non-political in the narrowest sense of that word.

As will already be apparent, the study of war clearly requires an investigation that is not limited to the battlefield. Even works, such as this one, which focus explicitly on the conduct of military operations, must recognise that these occur within a broader context in which other factors intrude. War is a duel and this imposes a certain discipline (the enemy gets a say in how things are done); suboptimal approaches chosen for cultural reasons usually incur some cost. However, the purposes for which wars are fought and the manner in which they are conducted necessarily reflects the character of those who wage them. For this reason the character of each war is different and to understand this character one must engage with a number of disciplines. A sophisticated understanding of war requires one to engage with (at least) political, social, cultural, economic and technological matters and this is reflected in the curricula of many military colleges (see Figure (i)). Any attempt to examine and explain war in its broadest sense is, therefore, a huge undertaking. As Azar Gat explained, '[w]ith war being connected to everything else and everything else being connected to war, explaining and tracing its development in relation to human development in general almost amounts to a theory and a history of everything'.[8] This book does not attempt to provide this. It is informed by an understanding of this complexity, and of the interdisciplinary nature of war studies, but the specific focus of this book is on the conduct of warfare.

Figure (i) US Admiral Jonathan Greenert addresses an international audience at the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College in February 2014. Colleges such as this reflect an understanding that armed forces must invest in the education of their personnel if they are to make appropriate decisions in an increasingly complex environment.

What is modern warfare?

US joint doctrine defines warfare as 'the mechanism, method, or modality of armed conflict against an enemy. It is "the how" of waging war'. More succinctly, British doctrine defines it as 'the conduct of war'.[9] The study of warfare, therefore, is a subset within the study of war. Warfare revolves around the use, and the threat to use, violence. Its study implies a particular focus on combat, the basic hard currency of war and the raison d'être for armed forces. This does not mean that political, social, cultural, economic and technological factors are not relevant; nothing could be further from the truth. Such factors set the context within which warfare is conducted and all play a part in determining how different societies or organisations approach the conduct of war. For this reason it is important to remember that the character of war and of warfare continues to change, as does the character of those societies that wage war and, by extension, there will be more than one characteristic form of war (and of warfare) in existence at any given time.

This rather begs the question as to what we actually mean by 'modern' warfare. Michael Sheehan has defined it as 'the forms of warfare shaped by and

reflecting the modern era of human history'."[10] Sadly this shifts but does not solve the definitional problem. What is the 'modern era of human history'? Returning to the dictionary suggests that 'modern' means 'of or relating to the present and recent times' or 'being in existence at this time'.[11] This may not help us much as there is little consensus on either point. Different authors have interpreted 'present and recent times' in different ways. The starting point of Theodore Ropp's 1959 examination of *War in the Modern World*, for example, was 1415.[12] Some authors begin with the age of Marlborough or Frederick the Great in the eighteenth century, the French Revolution of 1789 or the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. Others focus on the period from the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, from the start of the twentieth century, the end of the First World War and so on.

There is no more agreement on what 'being in existence at this time' might mean. Some might suggest that this implies a focus on the latest technology, most recent doctrine and evolving 'best practice' amongst the most advanced militaries (see Figure (ii)). Others might argue that some of the most effective practitioners of modern warfare have been sub-state groups able to exploit low-technology weapons and asymmetric tactics in support of their aims. Still more might claim that the idea of modern warfare is now rather passé and that we have entered a new era of 'post-modern warfare', 'fourth-generation warfare', 'hybrid warfare', of 'war amongst the people' or some other apparently new form of war. For example, it has become fashionable in recent years to conclude that future conflict will be predominantly asymmetric, that it will occur between irregular combatants or between these and regular armed forces and that interstate conventional warfare is a thing of the past. Such analysis may describe a particular moment in time when intra-state conflict and asymmetric warfare was the dominant concern. It is dangerous to assume that this will last forever.

The use of and the threat to use armed force is a recurrent feature of contemporary international relations. The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research identified that there were twenty-one wars and twenty-five limited wars in 2014 in addition to 177 violent crises. The majority of these were intra-state conflicts, with just one limited war and eleven violent crises identified as being between states. None of the latter escalated into war but a number did involve sporadic clashes and an apparent readiness to employ lethal force.[13] While interstate wars may have declined recently in terms of size, intensity and import, this may not represent as radical a change as is sometimes claimed (see Box (ii)). Further, it would seem premature to assume that there will never again be cause for one armed force to face another in a conventional conflict. As US hegemony is replaced by multi-polarity, great powers may once again find cause to fight each other. New technology or new techniques may give lesser powers the ability to defend themselves without having to resort, in the first instance, to asymmetric tactics that see their institutions toppled and their cities occupied. It may be the case that the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons may wane with

Figure (ii) As an advanced multi-role fifth-generation fighter the Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II represents the cutting edge of modern military technology. Weapons such as these reflect a Western emphasis on high-technology systems. Others engaged in 'modern warfare' may exploit much cheaper low-tech solutions out of choice or necessity.

further proliferation or with the development of more reliable ways of shooting down incoming missiles. All of these issues (and more) are discussed in this book. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that the future is uncertain.

It is important also to recognise the impact created by the potential to prevail in conventional combat. Military force does not have to be used to be useful. When a Vietnamese coastguard vessel gives way to its Chinese counterpart (without firing a shot) in a dispute in the South China Seas it may do so because it recognises that to open fire is to invite a conflict that it can only lose. The superior Chinese navy may not be actively engaged but is clearly relevant to the outcome. Similarly, Russian tanks may not have fought battles against their Ukrainian counterparts in spring 2014, but their perceived ability to do so helped to set the context within which Ukraine was inhibited from dealing with separatists in Crimea, leading to the secession of that region. Conventional military force was far from the only factor at play, but it is spurious to suggest

Box (ii) Interstate wars, intra-state wars and non-state wars

Across the centuries intra-state wars (i.e. wars within states) have occurred more frequently than interstate wars (those conducted between different states). The Correlates of War project identified that there were a total of ninety-five interstate wars between 1816 and 2007, of which thirty-eight occurred after the Second World War. Of the latter, nine came in the period after the end of the Cold War (i.e. since 1990). Over the same period (1816–2007) there were over 330 intra-state wars in addition to 62 non-state wars (where neither side was a state) and over 160 extra-state wars (where a state fought a non-state entity beyond its own borders). There were also many minor armed conflicts that did not meet the project's threshold for consideration. As a corrective to those who believe that interstate conflict now occurs much less frequently than before, it may be worth noting that in the first twenty-five years of the study (1816–41) there were only two interstate wars, twenty-four non-state wars and over thirty intra-state ones. There were more interstate wars in the last twenty-five years of the study than in the first twenty-five. On the other hand it would be fair to say that recent interstate conflicts have lacked the scale and the impact of many of those before 1945. There has also been a reduction in the number of battle-related casualties (as wars have tended to be shorter and less intense). This has not necessarily led to a reduction in overall civilian casualties, and these almost always surpass those of combatants. For example, there were around 145,000 battle-related deaths during the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1998 to 2001 but the war overall may have resulted in as many as 2.5 million deaths.[1]

[1] Correlates of War Project (www.correlatesofwar.org/). Bethany Lacina and Nils Peter Gleditsch, 'Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths', *European Journal of Population*, 21 (2005), 145–66.

that it was irrelevant. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War, in which Russian joint forces engaged and defeated their Georgian counterparts (who were attempting to suppress pro-Russian separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia), provides an illustration of the costs of thinking otherwise. Similarly, the United States and its allies may have spent a decade fighting insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq, typical of 'war amongst the people', but one should not forget why their enemies adopted asymmetric tactics; they had no other choice. Had the Taliban or Saddam Hussein been able to prevail in conventional warfare the United States and its allies would not have faced insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan; they could not have been there in the first place. Conventional superiority (across all domains) provided the context within which the enemies of the USA were forced to try something else.

In light of events in recent conflicts (notably the war in Afghanistan and the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah conflict) it is often now argued that modern warfare is increasingly 'hybrid' in nature, with adversaries employing a variety of techniques and procedures, both conventional and unconventional, within the same battlespace and tailored to exploit enemy weaknesses (see Figure (iii)). The

Figure (iii) A Hospital Corpsman assigned to a Female Engagement Team patrols with the US Marine Corps in Helmand province (Afghanistan) in 2010. Experience in Afghanistan demonstrated the difficulty of operating in a complex environment against an enemy adept at exploiting the challenges of 'war amongst the people' and where civil and political factors had a major impact on military possibilities.

concept of 'hybrid warfare' has gained significant traction and is often repeated within academic, professional and official literature. One might reasonably ask whether there has ever been a war that was not hybrid to some degree but, banal though it may be, the concept does at least focus attention on the complexity of current military operations and may help to foster an understanding that, in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome in these, one requires a comprehensive/integrated approach that brings together both military and civilian agencies (see Box (iii)). It also supports the idea that, rather than concentrating on only one apparently dominant form of warfare, armed forces may be required to operate across the spectrum of warfare (see Table (i)).

These issues are addressed throughout this book. The focus is on the kind of warfare that is 'in existence at this time' and our aim is to examine activities across the spectrum of warfare involving both conventional and unconventional forces. In order to examine these in a satisfactory fashion this requires also an examination of military concepts, organisations and activities in 'recent times'. We have tried to avoid being overly prescriptive about what this might actually mean. The degree to which one needs to look back in order to understand

Box (iii) The comprehensive/integrated approach

In the 2000s, and in light of experience in Afghanistan, the Balkans (in the 1990s) and also in Iraq, NATO developed the idea that success in crisis-management operations depended on the adoption of a comprehensive military, political and civilian approach. Military means, while essential, could not themselves provide solutions to such crises. Recently the UK armed forces have talked of the need for an 'integrated approach' within the context of crisis management and stabilisation, emphasising the need for many different agencies to work together, with the military just one element within a complex whole. While it may always have been the case that military, political and civilian agencies have had to co-operate to achieve useful results in such operations (e.g. see French operations in North Africa in the nineteenth century), the explicit articulation of ideas such as these makes formal and obvious that which was previously often only dimly understood.[1]

[1] For example, see the web page of the UK Ministry of Defence 'Stabilisation Unit' (www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/component/docman/cat_view/163-thematic/190-comprehensive-integrated-approach.html?Itemid=230).

Table (i) *'The Spectrum of Conflict and Operational Themes', Dept. of the [US] Army. FM 3-0,* Operations *(2008)*