PART I

Introduction

1 What is strategy?

Man made War in his own image.
(Willmott 2002: 14)

The way in which a society makes war is a projection of that society itself.

(Sidebottom 2004: 35)

Art of war or science of war, and technical definitions of 'strategy'

'Thinking war': this is how the French sociologist Raymond Aron characterised Clausewitz's work (Aron 1976). It is a conceptual challenge to write about the evolution of Strategy, especially with an emphasis on the social institutions, norms and patterns of behaviour within which it operates, the policies that guide it and the culture that influences it. For, as we shall see presently, the use of the word 'strategy' has changed very considerably over time. This book's *main* purpose is *not* to provide a history of the word 'strategy' and all that it denoted over time. Instead, it will examine how people thought about the link between political aims and the use of force, or its threat, which we will refer to as Strategy with a capital 'S'. This definition will be applied retrospectively to find out how strategists – writers on the conduct of war – thought about this issue in the past, whether or not they employed the actual term 'strategy', which after classical antiquity only came into use again around 1800.[1]

[1] To use the terminology of linguistics, I am using an onomasiological approach to the evolution of the discourse on Strategy as defined above, not the semasiological approach, which would be a history of the use of the word 'strategy' (Penth 2006: 5–18).

Nevertheless, the evolution of the term 'strategy' itself must be our starting point, not least in order to understand why there is so little agreement on the use of the term, and why it has changed so much over time. The Greek word 'strategy' (either as *strategía* or *strategiké*) was used in antiquity for the art or skills of the general (the *strategós*) – 'the general is the one who practises strategy'. By the sixth century at the latest, however, at the time of Emperor Justinian, in Byzantine usage, a difference was made between 'strategy' – 'strategy is the means by which the general may defend his own lands and defeat his enemy's' – and, hierarchically subordinated to it, 'tactics' (*taktiké*), the 'science [*epistéme*] which enables one to organize and maneuver a body of armed men in an orderly manner' (Anon. 6th c./1985: 10–135). It is possible that such definitions had already found their place in earlier works, such as the lost parts of Aeneas Tacticus (*c.* 357 BCE) or Frontinus (*c.* 35–103 or 104 CE). In either case, Frontinus in his Latin work on stratagems or ruses used the Greek words both for stratagem (*strategémon*) and for strategy (*strategía*), as neither word had a proper Latin equivalent (Frontinus *c.* 1st c. CE: I). Nor did Greek texts of the following centuries distinguish systematically between strategy and tactics. Maurice (539–602), the East Roman (Byzantine) emperor (from 582) wrote a work known a *Strategikón*, which dealt mainly with technical aspects of the conduct of war. A similar subject matter was discussed in a book in Greek called *Taktiké Theoría* dating from the second century CE, written by Aelianus Tacticus.

Emperor Leo VI ('the Wise', 865–912, emperor from 886) drew extensively on Aelianus in his own work, which later became known, not entirely appropriately, as *Taktiká* (Leo *c.* 900/1917), as Leo used the terms *strategía* and *taktiké* in the same hierarchical way as the sixth-century work referred to above. It would be Leo's work that would bring this greater meaning of 'strategy' to the West. Count John of Nassau-Siegen (1561–1623) in his *Book of War* drew on Maurice's *Stratégikon* and on Leo's *Taktiká*. John did not adopt the Greek term 'strategy', circumscribing it with the general's (*Feldher*) tasks. The word '*tactic*' he actually used (John 'the Middle' 1610/1973: 17, 516, 642). John thus built on Leo's analytical framework, which resonated in the literature, even though the word *strategía* had not yet become integrated into the Western languages.

The majority of authors before the French Revolution wrote neither about 'strategy' nor 'tactics' but about military matters in the

tradition of the Roman author Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, Vegetius for short, who lived in the late fourth century CE; or else they wrote 'military instructions' (Puységur 1690), or about the 'art of war' (Machiavelli 1521). In the Western world, the French Count Jacques Antoine Hippolyte Guibert (1743–91) was probably the first, in his *General Essay on Tactics*, to define higher and subordinate levels of the conduct of war, speaking of 'tactics' and 'grand tactics' when talking about war aims, the configurations of armed forces in relation to the political aims and several such dimensions which we would today regard as Strategy. Without ever using the word 'strategy', Guibert wrote about both what we would today call Strategy and Tactics, dwelling primarily on the relationship between the nature of a society, its internal values and foreign-policy objectives, with an overall Strategy derived from these values and objectives, the armed forces that match these and the way these should be employed, down to battlefield Tactics (Guibert 1772/1781). Just as Monsieur Jourdain had been speaking 'in prose' all his life without knowing the expression, Guibert was what today we would call a Strategic Theorist without thinking of himself in these terms.

Shortly after the publication of Guibert's *General Essay*, the Byzantine use of the terms which pertains even today was introduced in the West. In 1771 Paul-Gédéon Joly de Maizeroy (1719–80) translated Leo's *Taktiká* into French. He still hesitated to translate Leo's term '*strategía*' into French, and used 'the art of the general' in his translation itself, and '*stratégique*' in his commentary (Leo *c.* 900/1771: 5–7). But here, for the first time in the West, the two terms 'strategy' and 'tactics' were used in a hierarchical sense, strategy denoting the higher level, tactical the lower, of warfare. In 1777 Johann von Bourscheid in Vienna published a translation of Leo into German, more appropriately under the title *Emperor Leo the Wise's Strategy and Tactics* [*sic*]. From then onwards, the use of both terms in the Byzantine sense spread throughout the West.

Whether or not they used the term 'strategy', writers since antiquity posited that Strategy should be formulated on the basis of practical experience or theoretical reflections before being applied in war. Authors on war were divided as to whether they were writing about the art or the science of war, a debate that has not been settled to this day, and which from 1800 largely overlapped with the question whether 'strategy' concerned only theoretical reflection or also

practical applicability. This question can probably be found first in the writing of Archduke Charles (1771–1847), the Habsburg commander in the wars against Napoleon, who in 1806 defined 'strategy' as 'the science of war: it designs the plan, circumscribes and determines the development of military operations; it is the particular science of the supreme commander'. 'Tactics', by contrast, he defined as 'the art of war. It teaches the way in which strategic designs are to be executed; it is the necessary skill of each leader of troops' (Waldtstätten 1882: 57; Anon. 1814: vii, 3).

In contrast to all these, the Prussian philosopher-general Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) in his masterpiece on war spoke out against this categorisation of warfare as either an art or a science. Instead, he wrote,

> we could more accurately compare it to commerce, which is also a conflict of human interests and activities, and it is *still* closer to politics, which in turn may be considered as a kind of commerce on a larger scale. Politics, moreover, is the womb in which war develops.

This is where we encounter the idea about the relationship between politics and war for which Clausewitz is most famous, namely that 'war is an act of policy' (Clausewitz 1832/1976, I: 1, 24).

Surprisingly, in view of his theoretical ideas on war expressed in other parts of his work, Clausewitz used very narrow definitions. In Book II of *On War* he defined 'strategy' merely as 'the use of engagements for the object of the war' (Clausewitz 1832/1976, II: 1; III: 1). It was not Clausewitz's narrow definition of 'strategy', but his definition of war that would impress future thinkers: war as 'an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will' (Clausewitz 1832/1976, I: 1, 2). This view would resonate through the strategic writing of the following centuries, to the point where it became a commonplace to define the aim in war, and thus victory, as the successful imposition of one's will upon the enemy, and to see all Strategy as a pursuit of that aim.

The narrow Clausewitzian and Jominian definition of 'strategy' would live on until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1845 French Marshal Marmont defined 'strategy' as 'the general movements which are made beyond the enemy's range of sight and before the battle', while 'tactics is the science of the application of manoeuvres' (Marmont 1845: 17–25). Writing in 1853, the French naval officer

Louis-Édouard, Count Bouët-Willaumez defined 'strategy' as 'the art of determining the decisive points of the theatre of war and the general lines and routes along which armies have to move to get there' (Taillemite 1999: 50). Indeed, this unimaginative definition would be echoed well into the twentieth century (Mordacq 1921: 15), albeit mainly outside France, where the words 'tactics' and 'strategy' were apparently rarely uttered until after France's crushing defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1870/1 (Mayer 1916: 7).

One of the echoes came from Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder who saw the 'essence' [*Wesen*] of 'strategy' in the preparations needed to get troops to the battlefield simultaneously (q.i. Schlichting 1897: II: 11). Elsewhere he proclaimed more originally that 'strategy is a system of expediencies' which defied general principles that could be taught (Großer Generalstab 1911: 1). His Russian contemporary, General Mikhail Ivanovich Dragomirov, dismissed the concept of a 'science' of war out of hand, instead endorsing the concept of a 'theory of war' (q.i. Foch 1900/1918: 8). Other very technical definitions abounded, such as this by Clausewitz's contemporary Wilhelm von Willisen: 'Strategy is the doctrine of making connections … the doctrine of battling [*Schlagen*] is tactics' (Willisen 1840: 26). Or take another, that of the Britons Sir Edward Hamley, General J.F. Maurice (1891:7; 1929: 3) and G.F.R. Henderson (1905: 39), who by 'strategy' understood 'the art of rightly directing the masses of troops towards the objects of the campaign'. 'The theatre of war is the province of strategy, the field of battle is the province of tactics.' French General Bonnal, lecturing at the Ecole de Guerre in 1892–3, told his students that '[s]trategy is the art of conceiving; tactics the science of execution' (Castex 1937: 6). In the Cold War, Marxist-Leninist definitions continued to follow narrow definitions of 'strategy' and 'tactics', adding the intermediary level of operation (Leebaert 1981: 14f.).

Clearly, these technical definitions did not make allowance for the political directives under which Strategy operated. Wider concepts were needed. The British military historian Henry Spenser Wilkinson, in discussing naval operations in 1894, gave this definition: 'A policy is national action directed to an end or purpose. The object set up must be one that the nation values and appreciates, or else the Government will have no support in its efforts to attain it. And the means must be suitable to the end' (Wilkinson 1894: 21). A

decade later, Lt.-Col. Walter James, while using narrow definitions of 'strategy' and 'tactics', dwelt on the political aims of warfare:

> Strategy is largely affected by moral considerations. Of two different courses – one of which might give important political, the other more purely military results – it will sometimes be more advantageous to choose the former, because of the greater effect it will have on the course of the war. (James 1904: 17f.)

We see how gradually, the line between policy and 'strategy', especially 'grand strategy', was becoming blurred. The emphasis of the link between policy and military execution becomes particularly strong in the writings of Captain (later Sir) Basil Henry Liddell Hart, whose most important works stem from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. He dismissed earlier definitions as too narrow, instead developing the concept further again. For Liddell Hart, 'strategy' was 'the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy' (Liddell Hart 1944: 229). This definition, which has great merits, is so broad, however, that Richards Betts would be justified in criticising it for making 'strategy' synonymous with foreign (or indeed any) policy (Betts 2001/2: 23).

This had already been recognised by French General André Beaufre (1902–75) and French sociologist Raymond Aron (1905–83). Aron suggested fusing the terms 'policy' and 'strategy' in the neologism 'praxeology'. Beaufre, however, decided to stick with 'strategy', using 'total strategy' as equivalent to the British term 'grand strategy'. Hence Beaufre argued that all warfare is 'total', by which he meant 'carried on in all fields of action', political, economic, military, cultural, and so forth (Beaufre 1966/1967: 19–23, 29). This, however, lends itself to considerable terminological confusion in view of other usage of the term 'total war' (as we shall see in chapter 7).

While Aron's term 'praxeology' failed to catch on, agreement on his insistence on the link between Strategy and practice spread. His American contemporary Bernard Brodie wrote in the middle of the Cold War that 'Strategic thinking, or "theory" if one prefers, is nothing if not pragmatic. Strategy is a "how to do it" … guide to accomplishing something and doing it efficiently … Above all, strategic theory is a theory for action' (Brodie 1973: 452f.). From this, Colin Gray developed the idea of 'strategic theory' which 'helps educate the

strategist so that he can conceive of, plan, and execute strategy by his command performance' (Gray 2010).

With the introduction of the concept of 'grand strategy' in the Second World War, something closely akin to overall state policy on foreign and military affairs, new variations appear in our list of definitions. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff in their *Dictionary of the U.S. Military Terms for Joint Usage* of 1964 defined 'strategy' as the development and use of

> political, economic, psychological and military forces as necessary during peace and war, to afford the maximum support to policies, in order to increase the probabilities and favourable consequences of victory and to lessen the chances of defeat. (q.i. Luttwak 1987: 239–41)

The British political scientist Robert Neild in 1990 defined 'strategy' in an even wider way, as the pursuit of

> political aims by the use or possession of military means. In formulating strategy, the first step is to decide on political aims. Without political aims, war is mindless destruction and the possession of military means in peacetime is mindless waste. Once political aims are specified, the military means must be selected and tailored to fit those aims. (Neild 1990: 1)

Thus the link between policy at the highest level and the use of military force as its tool, postulated by Clausewitz but not yet coupled by him to the word 'strategy', gradually became a matter of universal consensus. And yet there was scope for further refinement of the concept, which, as we shall see, brought further essential dimensions of strategy into focus.

The articulation of different dimensions of Strategy

War as an instrument of politics

The rediscovery of the great political philosophers of antiquity and their ideas about the *polis*, the body politic, the state and its relation to its armed forces, made thinkers of the modern age write about the link between Strategy and politics. A crucial place in the translation of these classical philosophical concepts into modern times is held by Niccolò

Machiavelli (1469–1527), who besides writing on the *Art of War* (structured much like Vegetius' classical handbook) also wrote about politics, in his more famous work *The Prince* and in the *Discourses*. Other philosophers on the state, politics, justice and law, such as Matthew Sutcliffe (1546 or 1547–1629) in England, Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) in the Netherlands repeatedly touched on war in their works. Just as Roman law had developed concepts of a justifiable use of war, set in stone for the Christian world by Augustine of Hippo and after him Thomas Aquinas, they were mainly concerned with the legality and legitimacy of warfare.

A few exceptional writers in the tradition of Machiavelli brought these strands of thought together. The most prominent are Sutcliffe, dean of Exeter; the Spanish aristocrat, officer and diplomat Don Alvaro of Navia Osorio and Vigil, Viscount of Puerto, Marquis of Santa Cruz de Marcenado (1684–1732); and Guibert. Coming from the classical Roman and then Catholic just-war tradition (see chapter 2), they assumed that the end state of war should be peace, but a more just peace than that preceding the war (e.g. Saillans 1589/1591: ch. 5). For Sutcliffe, Lipsius and Grotius it was taken for granted that peace had to be the end state of war. In the eighteenth century, the Swiss philosopher Emerich de Vattel by contrast reflected on the consequences of the imposition of an *unjust* peace which would lead to renewed war (Vattel 1758/1834: Book IV). At the close of the eighteenth century, Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow in Prussia had no such qualms: he defined the purpose of all operations in war as bringing about 'peace, which one tries to force upon the enemy through the harm done to him, to be advantageous to oneself, and disadvantageous to him' (Bülow 1799: 12). Nevertheless, there was thus consensus from Cicero to the French Revolution that the only sensible aim of war could be a durable peace. Napoleon's insatiable expansionism, however, changed this perception.

The nexus between political war aims and the conduct of war was commonplace by the time Clausewitz put his pen to paper – it was so widely accepted that few saw the need to spell it out. One who did spell it out was August Wagner, who opined that no commander would be greatly successful unless he knew

> what is generally true about all wars; why each war … has been started; which means are to be applied, not alone to win, but to achieve the aims, for the purpose of which one has taken up arms; in short, who has not