The Direction of War

The wars since 9/11, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, have generated frustration and an increasing sense of failure in the west. Much of the blame has been attributed to poor strategy. In both the United States and the United Kingdom, public enquiries and defence think tanks have detected a lack of consistent direction, of effective communication and of governmental coordination. In this important new book, Sir Hew Strachan, one of the world's leading military historians, reveals how these failures resulted from a fundamental misreading and misapplication of strategy itself. He argues that the wars since 2001 have not in reality been as 'new' as has been widely assumed and that we need to adopt a more historical approach to contemporary strategy in order to identify what is really changing in how we wage war. If war is to fulfil the aims of policy, then we need first to understand war.

Hew Strachan is Chichele Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls College. Between 2004 and 2012 he was the Director of the Oxford Programme on the Changing Character of War. He also serves on the Strategic Advisory Panel of the Chief of the Defence Staff, on the UK Defence Academy Advisory Board, and on the Council of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. *Foreign Policy* listed him as one of the most influential global thinkers for 2012 and he was knighted in the New Year's Honours for 2013. Professor Strachan's books include the first volume of his projected three-volume work *The First World War* (2001), which was awarded two American military history prizes and nominated for the Glenfiddich Scottish book of the year; *The First World War: a New Illustrated History* (2003), published to accompany a ten-part television series for Channel 4 and nominated for a British Book Award; and *Clausewitz's 'On War': a Biography* (2007). His recent edited volumes include *The Changing Character of War* (2011) and *How Fighting Ends* (2012).

THE DIRECTION OF WAR

Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective

Hew Strachan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the product of the past decade. Externally, its departure points are a bit longer ago than that, beginning with the attacks of 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Personally, they are marked by my appointment to the Chichele Professorship of the History of War at Oxford in 2001, which I took up in January 2002, and by the subsequent award to the university in 2003 of a large grant from the Leverhulme Trust to study the changing character of war.

In 2001 I had just completed the first volume of a planned three-volume account of the First World War and planned to use the next ten years to complete the next two. Initially, therefore, I was reluctant to head Oxford's bid to the Leverhulme Trust, but pressure from a number of quarters, and in particular from the Chairman of the Faculty of Modern History, Christopher Haigh, and from the Head of the Department of Politics and International Relations, Mark Philp, persuaded me that I should. The resulting inter-disciplinary programme, incorporating not only history and politics but also philosophy and law, was in part a product of circumstance: no single Oxford department had enough concentrated expertise in war to mount a credible bid. In part, however, it was good luck: the combination of disciplines produced a wonderfully creative discussion and one entirely appropriate to the complexity and diversity of the subject. I owe an enormous debt not only to the Leverhulme Trust for its five-year funding of the Changing Character of War Programme (from 2004 to 2009) but also to my colleagues in it, Guy Goodwin-Gill, Sir Adam Roberts, David Rodin and Henry Shue. Since 2009, the programme has been supported by

the Fell Fund, and at the time of writing its future has just been assured for a further five years (until 2017). The burden of its administration has fallen on four directors of studies, successively Audrey Kurth Cronin, Sibylle Scheipers, Andrea Baumann and Jan Lemnitzer, from all of whom I have learned a great deal – as I have from our research associates, Alia Brahimi, Alexandra Gheciu, Thomas Hippler, Sarah Percy, Uwe Steinhoff and Gil-li Vardi. Since 2008 I have relied above all on Rob Johnson, whose own expertise, both in central Asia and in military affairs, has given fresh impetus to activities in Oxford, and who took over the directorship of the programme from me in September 2012. Several of my research students will recognise in this book arguments which we have developed in supervisions, and I am no longer sure who thought of what first, but in particular I should single out Mike Finch, Gabriela Frei, T. X. Hammes, Walter Ladwig, Jacqueline Newmyer and Timo Noetzel.

From the first the Changing Character of War Programme sought engagement with practitioners, even if in 2004 we did not see how protracted and intense that experience or that opportunity would be. Major General Jonathan Bailey joined us when he retired from his last post in the Army as Director General Development and Doctrine, and for the ensuing seven years ran a seminar on 'campaigning and generalship', which brought both senior officers and their political and legal advisers to Oxford to discuss their experiences. My thinking has been immeasurably sharpened as a consequence, as it has been by the armed forces' increasing recognition of the value which a spell at Oxford can give serving personnel. The growing readiness over the past five years to create opportunities for those at war to have the space to think and to educate themselves may have been belated but it has now become impressive and mutually valuable. I only hope it is sustained, as the national interest demands it must be.

In 2009 the Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock (now Lord) Stirrup, involved a small group in a series of discussions about strategy, what it is, how it might be done and how it might be reinvigorated in Britain. From those discussions his Strategic Advisory Panel was formed. I owe a considerable debt, both to him and to his successor, General Sir David Richards. All the single service chiefs have invited me to speak on several occasions at their conferences, and I have been grateful to Admiral Sir Jonathon Band and Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope of the Royal Navy, General Sir Richard (now Lord) Dannatt and General Sir Peter Wall of the Army, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn

Torpy and Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton of the Royal Air Force. The opportunity to try out my ideas on hard-headed practitioners has also come in several other forms. When General Sir Mike (now Lord) Walker and General Sir Mike Jackson were successively Chiefs of the General Staff I was invited to take part in their Future Army Study Periods at Warminster, so acquiring a renewed awareness of operational practicalities. I had not had much exposure to the latter since the late 1970s, when I had participated in war games in the Alanbrooke Hall of the Army Staff College at Camberley. The latter tended to end with a big, if fortunately metaphorical, nuclear bang somewhere in north Germany; the former were more indeterminate in their outcomes, entirely conventional in their weaponry, and focused away from central and western Europe. Perhaps most significant of all, operations were shaped by brigades, not corps-level commands.

Camberley was where I began my engagement with real soldiers. In 1978 the intervention of the late Sir John Keegan brought me to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and those whom I met then and who have continued to influence my thinking have included Christopher Donnelly, the late Richard Holmes and Keith Simpson MP. In 1988 I returned to lecture on the first Higher Command and Staff Course, then created for and run solely by the Army, an experience that was at once energising and enlightening: the Army was thinking. HCSC is now a joint offering and is run at the Defence Academy at Shrivenham, but I have lectured to it almost without a break since my first initiation and have benefited enormously from interaction with the best brains of the services. The opportunities to lecture on the Advanced Command and Staff Course and at the Royal College of Defence Studies have given similar engagement, and become increasingly important as the level and depth of front-line experience have risen. The creation of the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, now the Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre, at Shrivenham has renewed my involvement with the development of military doctrine begun by Major General Christopher Elliott when he held the Army post subsequently taken up by Jonathan Bailey and appointed me his academic adviser. Successive Directors of DCDC, Rear Admiral Chris Parry, Lieutenant General Sir Paul Newton, Air Vice Marshal Paul Colley and Major General Andrew Sharpe, have all fed ideas to me and also made me think in return. Others from the British armed services to whom I am indebted (at least some of them through the institutional links mentioned above), many of whom I count as friends,

include: Commander Simon Atkinson, Brigadier Tim Bevis, Lieutenant General Sir Adrian Bradshaw, Lieutenant General Sir James Bucknall, Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burridge, Lieutenant General Nick Carter, Major General James Cowan, Major General Tim Cross, Lieutenant General Andrew Graham, Brigadier Charles Grant, Field Marshal Lord Guthrie, Group Captain Mike Hart, General Sir Nick Houghton, Field Marshal Lord Inge, Brigadier Richard Iron, Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin, Vice Admiral Philip Jones, Lieutenant General Sir Graeme Lamb, Rear Admiral Tom Karsten, Lieutenant General Sir John Kiszely, General Sir John McColl, Major General Andrew Mackay, Air Vice Marshal Iain McNicoll, Lieutenant General Simon Mayall, Major General Mungo Melvin, Lieutenant General Jacko Page, General Sir Nick Parker, Lieutenant General Jonathon Riley, Major General Sir Sebastian Roberts, Lieutenant General Sir Bill Rollo, Major General Andy Salmon, Major General Jonathan Shaw, General Sir Richard Shirreff, Captain Emile Simpson, General Sir Rupert Smith, Captain Georges Strachan-Heyes, Air Commodore Edward Stringer, Group Captain Johnny Stringer, Rear Admiral Bob Tarrant, Brigadier Ian Thomas and Admiral Lord West. I know there are many others to whom I am indebted, and I hope they will forgive my unconscious omission of their names.

I have lectured and conducted seminars at least twice a year over the past decade in Norway, principally at the Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy in Trondheim but also at the Staff College in Oslo, and I am grateful to Tom Christiansen, Karl Erik Haug, Lieutenant Colonel Harald Høiback, Ole Jørgen Maaø, Janne Haaland Matlary, Nils Naastad and Colonel John Andreas Olsen. In France, where strategic thought remains wonderfully fertile, I have benefited from interactions at the École Militaire in Paris and from conferences at the École de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan, and have learnt much from the late Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, Didier Danet, Général Vincent Desportes, Etienne de Durand, Colonel Benoît Durieux, Colonel Michel Goya, Laurent Henninger, Bastien Irondelle, and especially Christian Malis. In Italy my debt is to another Frenchman, Pascal Vennesson (who is now based in Singapore), as well as to Elizabetta Brighi (who is now based in London) and to Nicola Labanca. In Germany, I must thank Michael Epkenhans, Bernd Greiner, Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Herfried Münkler and Dierk Walter.

Outside Europe, thanks to invitations from Audrey Kurth Cronin and John Maurer, I have been able to lecture at regular intervals at the US National War College in Washington, DC and at the US Naval War

College in Newport, Rhode Island, and so have been exposed to American service thinking. I have also spoken at Harvard (thanks to Stephen Rosen), at Tufts (thanks to Leila Fawaz) and to the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) in North Carolina. My gratitude is also due to Stephen Biddle, Eliot Cohen, Peter Feaver, Bruce Hoffman, Frank Hoffman, Isabel Hull, David Kilcullen (even if he is really an Australian), Richard Kohn, Brian McAllister Linn, Major General H. R. McMaster, Carter Malkasian, Daniel Marston, General James Mattis, Williamson Murray, John Nagl, Admiral Gary Roughead and Todd Greentree. In Australia, the Australian Defence Force Academy of the University of New South Wales, the Land Warfare Studies Centre of the Australian Army and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute have all given me platforms, and I have incurred debts to Major General Peter Abigail, Brigadier Adam Findlay, Rear Admiral James Goldrick, Jeffrey Grey, Raspal Khosa, Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm McGregor, Lieutenant Colonel Mark O'Neill and Hugh White. In New Zealand, where, through the generosity of the Garfield Weston Foundation, I enjoyed the Kippenberger visiting professorship at the Centre for Strategic Studies at Victoria University Wellington in 2009, I have to thank Robert Ayson, Peter Cozens, Glyn Harper, Gerald Hensley, Emmet McElhattan, Ian McGibbon, John Mackinnon, the late Denis McLean, and Robert Patman. Finally, the focus for much of my thinking has been in Afghanistan. I have managed to return twice to a country whose beauty, frustrations and peoples first bewitched me in happier times in 1971, and I owe much to the wisdom, good sense and experience of Daniele Riggio. Those trips were organised by NATO, but most of my other travel, as well as the attendant complications of my commitments, has been handled with wonderful efficiency and aplomb by Rosemary Mills. It is as a concession to her and to my wife's long-suffering patience that I have now finally acquired a mobile telephone – but secure in the assurance that we have no signal at home, amid the hills of the Scottish Borders.

In Britain, the three London think tanks which focus on security issues, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House) and the Royal United Services Institute, have all involved me in their conferences, seminars and lectures. Much that is contained in this book found its first shape in their publications. My debts are to Dana Allin, Brigadier Ben Barry and Jeffrey Mazo of IISS; to Paul Cornish, formerly of Chatham House and now of Exeter University; and to Malcolm Chalmers, Michael Clarke, Rear Admiral

Richard Cobbold, Michael Codner, Terry McNamee and Elizabeth Quintana of RUSI. Others from whom I have learnt when discussing the issues raised in what follows have included James Arbuthnot MP, Tarak Barkawi, Antony Beevor, Mats Berdal, David Betz, Desmond Bowen, Lindy Cameron, Bruno Colson, Tam Dalyell, Vincent Devine, James de Waal, Theo Farrell, Nik Gowing, Gary Hart, Sir Max Hastings, Simon Hornblower, Bernard Jenkin MP, Anthony King, Baroness Neville-Jones, Richard Norton-Taylor, Patricia Owens, Hugh Powell, the late Sir Michael Quinlan, Cheyney Ryan, the Marquess of Salisbury, Paul Schulte and Emma Sky.

Needless to say, many of those named above disagree with some of what follows, but our discussions have deepened my understanding and have made me realise how frequently the character of war has changed over the past decade. It has been a privilege to have been in a position where I could observe that process, could study its consequences and could test my thoughts with those who – unlike me – have had to put ideas into practice.

A couple of years ago, one of my former research students, Jacqueline Newmyer, returned to Oxford and asked how I was getting on with the writing of the second and third volumes of my history of the First World War. It is a question to which I have grown accustomed over the past ten years. My response was to say that I had become so caught up in the analysis of current conflict and the public policy aspects associated with it that progress had been slow. I went on to remark that, as the holder of a distinguished chair dedicated to the study of war, with friends and even close family putting their lives at risk in dangerous places, I felt I was under some sort of moral obligation to address more immediate problems rather than pursue my own preference to study the past. I promptly added that of course that sounded ridiculously pompous; Jackie replied that it sounded not pompous but patriotic.

Jackie Newmyer is an American. No British academic could justify what he or she does in terms of patriotism without losing caste or credibility. However, I suspect that my family will tend to agree with Jackie: having had no family holiday since 2004, they, and especially my wife, have lived through too much separation and too little recreation. If there is a form of service in these pages, it may go some way to compensate for the opportunity costs that they represent. On 7 June 2012 the Chief of the General Staff introduced his Land Warfare conference at RUSI by talking about the plans for the future Army, Army 2020 or Future Force

2020 as they have been variously dubbed. He generously attributed to me an input that was undoubtedly greater in the telling than it was in actuality. He said that I gave the Army 'tough love'. I hope he is right: the academic profession has little to give the profession of arms if it does not tell it as it sees it, even at the risk of sometimes getting things wrong. The British Army – great institution though it is – can still hold on to fixed ideas for too long and without thinking through their real meaning or implication. Believing something to be other than it is has repercussions in war which do not just produce exchanges of fire in learned journals. People get killed and wounded, and as importantly they kill and wound others. The consequences are too fraught for any other type of love to be acceptable.

This book is derived from pieces already published elsewhere, but all the chapters have been revised, in some cases extensively, in order to update them, to remove duplication and to add fresh matter.

Chapter 1 was delivered as a lecture at a conference organised by the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies and was first published as 'War and strategy', in *On new wars* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2007), pp. 13–27, edited by John Andreas Olsen.

Chapter 2 was delivered as (my somewhat belated) inaugural lecture in the University of Oxford in December 2003. It was published as 'The lost meaning of strategy', *Survival*, 47, no. 3 (2005), pp. 33–54, and was reprinted in Thomas G. Mahnken and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *Strategic studies: a reader* (Routledge, 2008).

Chapter 3 was first published as 'A Clausewitz for every season', in *American Interest*, July–August 2007.

Chapter 4 was delivered as a paper at a conference on European and American ways of warfare, at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Study of the European University Institute in Florence in June 2006, and was published as 'Making strategy: civil–military relations after Iraq', *Survival*, 48 (Autumn 2006), pp. 59–82.

Chapter 5 was a delivered as a paper at the Global Security Conference of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Geneva, and was then developed as the Annual History Lecture at the University of Hull, both in 2007. It was published as 'Strategy and the limitation of war', *Survival*, 50 (February–March 2008), pp. 31–53, and reprinted in Patrick M. Cronin (ed.), *The impenetrable fog of war: reflections on modern warfare and strategic surprise* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), pp. 67–84.

Chapter 6 was first published as 'Les armées européennes ne peuvent-elles mener que des guerres limitées?', *Politique étrangère*, 2 (2011), pp. 305–17.

Chapter 7 began as a paper delivered to a conference on 'L'Européen et la guerre', held at the Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan, on 24–25 November 2010, and is due to appear in a volume of the same name published by Economica in Paris and edited by Christian Malis.

Chapter 8 is derived from a talk given at the First Sea Lord's conference in 2006 and published as 'Maritime strategy: historical perspectives', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 152 (2007), pp. 29–33.

Chapter 9 is built round a lecture on Douhet delivered at the Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy in 2011 and published as 'Technology and strategy: thoughts on Douhet', in Øisten Espenes and Ole Jørgen Maaø (eds.), *Luftmaktstenkningens 'enfant terrible': Festkrift til Nils E. Naastad på 60-årsdagen* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2012), pp. 187–96.

Chapter 10 was first delivered as the Kippenberger Lecture in Wellington on 5 August 2009 and published as 'War is war: current conflicts in historical perspective', in Geoffrey Till and Hew Strachan, *The Kippenberger Lectures 2008–2009*, Discussion Paper 08/10, Centre for Strategic Studies: New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington. It also makes use of the annual lecture of the Oxford History Faculty in January 2009, and of a talk delivered at the Chief of the General Staff's Land Warfare Conference in June 2009 and published as 'One war but joint warfare', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 154, no. 4 (August 2009).

Chapter 11 was first published as 'Strategy or alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the operational level of war', *Survival*, 52, no. 5, (October–November 2010), pp. 157–82.

Chapter 12 was delivered as a lecture at the annual conference of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in Canberra in August 2011, and was published as 'Strategy and contingency', *International Affairs*, 87, no. 6 (November 2011), pp. 1281–97.

Chapter 13 was delivered as a paper called 'Strategy in the twenty-first century' at the summation conference of the Changing Character of War Programme in March 2009, and was published under the same title in Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers (eds.), *The changing character of war* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 503–23.