Introduction

> Is war not just another form of expression employed by peoples and governments? Indeed, war has its own grammar but not its own logic.[1]
> —Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

War's Logic provides a fresh perspective into twentieth-century American strategic thought. More to the point, it offers unique insights into how several of America's prominent strategic theorists conceived of armed conflict. The title stands for a general way of thinking about war. It refers to the reasoning that underlies a theorist's critical concepts, core principles, and basic assumptions regarding the nature and character of war. As Carl von Clausewitz observed, war's logic is invariably political in nature. Similarly, readers of this book will note the American way of thinking about war was frequently political in nature. While *War's Logic* covers ground similar to that of Russell Weigley's classic, *The American Way of War*, it differs from his work in three important respects.[2] First, it draws from archives unavailable to Weigley, thereby providing a richer analysis, albeit covering one century rather than two.[3] Relatedly, it carries its analysis beyond the early 1970s, where his book ended, to address the strategic theories of the 1980s and 1990s, and the American rediscovery of operational art. Finally, it delivers a broader interpretation of US strategic thought by situating it within its various sociocultural contexts across the twentieth century, thus avoiding the narrowly focused "tunnel" histories typical of Weigley's day.[4]

Specifically, *War's Logic* examines the ideas of twelve major US strategic theorists: Alfred Thayer Mahan, William (Billy) Mitchell, Bernard Brodie, Robert E. Osgood, Thomas C. Schelling, Herman Kahn, Henry E. Eccles, Joseph C. Wylie, Harry G. Summers, Jr., John Boyd, William S. Lind, and John Warden III. While their concepts and theories cannot capture the full sum of the American way of thinking about war, they represent a reasonable cross-section of military and nonmilitary perspectives: two from the US Army, including Mitchell; three from the US Navy; two from the US Air Force, one of whom (Boyd) became an

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honorary member of the US Marine Corps; and five civilians. Their collective ideas cover more than seven generations of US strategic thinking.[5] Admittedly, not every author listed here qualifies as a strategic theorist. Mitchell and Summers were military critics and commentators more than theorists. Boyd, Lind, and Warden concerned themselves with refining operational art rather than theorizing about military strategy. Each thinker, nonetheless, attempted to transform the American approach to war, and each succeeded at least partially.

To be sure, war's nature and its character are closely related concepts. After all, the words nature and character have been synonyms in English since at least the early eighteenth century. The terms were used interchangeably in US military literature until the early 1990s, when, as Part IV shows, interservice debates made it necessary to distinguish between the two. For purposes of this study, the nature of war denotes an author's sense of what armed conflict, at root, was; whereas the character of war refers to the procedural aspects of armed conflict, or a way of fighting; it includes types of conflicts, such as a revolutionary or civil war, in addition to types of warfare, such as naval warfare or air warfare. Context provided a reasonably sure guide as to whether an author meant war's nature or its character, as defined in this study. For instance, Mahan's debate with the pacifist Norman Angell over whether killing in war could ever be morally justified, reveals what the naval strategist believed armed conflict essentially to be, namely a violent extension of the competitive side of human nature. Mahan's lectures on the principles of naval strategy, in contrast, clearly refer to war's character, meaning the special features of naval warfare. It is possible, moreover, for two theorists to have a similar understanding of war's nature but a very different sense of its character. Mahan saw sea power as decisive; while Mitchell considered sea power to have been eclipsed by air power.

By comparison, twenty-first-century military professionals use the term nature of war to refer to those characteristics all armed conflicts have in common. All wars involve a "clash of opposing wills," for instance, as well as the elements of chance and uncertainty which make it impossible to reduce war to a predictable science.[6] War's nature is viewed as unchanging because those forces, though dynamic and variable, are always present, even if minimally. In contrast, the phrase character of war refers to the many types of armed conflicts, including the kinds of participants and their fighting methods, which naturally vary across time and cultures. By this reckoning, irregular warfare has the same nature as regular warfare but not the same character. This dichotomous construct of war's nature and character, though flawed, enables military professionals to study warfare systematically.

As this book shows, at least four distinct models or paradigms of war's nature underpinned US strategic thinking in the twentieth century: traditional, modern, materialist, and political. Mahan and Mitchell typified the traditional model, which saw armed conflict as the natural outgrowth of the competitive instincts of human nature. To be sure, any number of theories of human nature exist. Mahan was raised according to Episcopalian values and believed human nature had a "fallen" or corrupt quality about it. Mitchell, though raised in an Episcopalian boarding school, was, by comparison, more agnostic. Nonetheless, both believed negative behavior was inseparable from the human condition, which in turn made war inevitable but deplorable. The traditional paradigm, which held sway through the Second World War, applied equally well to regular and irregular conflicts. Nor was it uniquely American, as attempts to explain armed conflict as an outgrowth of human nature can be found among classical European military writings, such as Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*.

The second, or modern, paradigm expanded and refined the traditional one with the help of the English translation of Clausewitz's *On War* by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. The publication of that text, which also contributed to a Clausewitzian renaissance of sorts, provided America's military and policy practitioners with a ready framework for articulating the central role of chance and uncertainty in warfare. War was still a violent extension of human nature. But the debilitating factors of chance and uncertainty received additional attention. By the 1950s, Eccles and Wylie had begun to incorporate those elements into their theories; these naval officers, along with US Army Col. Harry Summers, helped set the conditions for the shift to the modern paradigm of war's nature. That model was enthusiastically embraced by Boyd, Lind, and a host of other maneuver theorists during the 1980s. Boyd's thoughts also exemplified the model's increasingly secular turn. He was born into a Roman Catholic family but came to believe human nature's competitiveness was biologically determined, an essential impulse rather than a spiritual flaw.

The third, or materialist, model of war's nature considered armed conflict largely through a technological lens. This paradigm began to form in the early 1990s in the wake of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, which debuted some long-range, precision-strike capabilities, albeit in limited numbers. It regarded the debilitating influences of chance and uncertainty as largely mitigatable through information technology, and it criticized the modern paradigm for being hidebound and hostile to innovation. The model's materialist quality came from its twofold presumption that destroying a party's material capacity to resist would suffice to destroy its willingness to fight, and that tangible

solutions could be found for most of war's dilemmas, specifically, that information technology could "lift the fog of war."[7] In short, the materialist paradigm sought to ignore war's intangible nature in favor of its tangible character. After all, military practitioners were meant to deal with the physical world, not its metaphysical counterpart. Warden's theories laid the groundwork for this paradigm, while other airpower theorists and precision-strike specialists developed it further. Notably, Clausewitz's trinity omitted the influences of technology and economic might; however, historian Michael Handel suggested "squaring" the trinity by augmenting it with a material dimension.[8] That suggestion could have created the requisite conceptual space for the modern and materialist paradigms to merge. Nevertheless, most Clausewitz scholars saw the addition as unnecessary and never supported it sufficiently for it to gain traction.

The fourth, or political, model likens war's nature to a coiled spring. It considers political purpose to be the chief determinant of war's nature, and the only meaningful element in the Clausewitzian trinity. It believes a small accident or error in judgment could lead to a ruinously violent escalation, not only because of the mechanistic character of nuclear warfare, but also because military instincts and public passions were considered explosive. This paradigm achieved its sharpest articulation with the rise of limited war theory in the 1950s, though one can find evidence of it well before then. It still influences much of US strategy, as revealed by the fact that contemporary decisions to limit military actions are largely reflexive rather than calculated. Brodie, Osgood, Shelling, and Kahn – Weigley's strategy intellectuals – actively promoted this model, arguing, not unjustly, that only policy had the broad perspective necessary to ensure the instincts of the military and the passions of the populace were properly managed. The flaw inherent in this paradigm, of course, is its presumption that policy itself is a priori rational, whereas history offers numerous instances in which the opposite is true.

These four paradigms show little evidence of having "shifted" in the sense popularized by historian of science Thomas Kuhn in his 1962 work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn defined scientific paradigms as: "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners," which, in turn, influence rules, expectations, and education to form the "basis for the practice of science."[9] In a similar vein, the strategic paradigms discussed were derived from recognized military achievements (successful uses of force) that for a time provided model problems and solutions (doctrinal concepts and procedures) to the military and policy communities, which in turn shaped rules, expectations, and professional

education to form the basis for strategic practice. For Kuhn, scientific revolutions followed a cycle, the heart of which was the paradigm shift, which occurred when the number of observations (anomalies) the previous theory or model could not explain reached the level of a crisis. In contrast, the only paradigm shift that occurred in American strategic thought was from the traditional model to the modern one, and it was closer to an augmentation than a revolution. The other three paradigms remain in fierce but not necessarily overt competition with one another. Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts is useful, nonetheless, for illustrating what has not happened in the American way of thinking about war.

The modern, materialist, and political paradigms, moreover, continue to contribute to shaping and reinforcing service perspectives, as evidenced by seemingly endless battles over the US defense budget and the country's national military strategy. Conceptions of war's nature are, therefore, of central importance, contrary to what some academics or practitioners have argued. Each community prefers its paradigm, however imperfect, over other models, even though the services may make some concessions in the interest of jointness. Accordingly, the American approach to strategy has become, more or less, what the German émigré and military historian Herbert Rosinski described in 1959, as an "*anarchy* of the most differently conceived military strategies."[10] While anarchy is lamentable in some respects, it is preferable to autocracy or to hegemony; the dominance of one paradigm over the others would stifle creativity and preclude alternative solutions. In addition, autocracy is unnecessary since the "ends-ways-means-risk" model of strategy introduced by Arthur Lyyke, Jr., for all its flaws, prevents anarchy from sliding into chaos by providing a conceptual framework for interservice and interagency debates.

Weigley's *American Way of War*, though pathbreaking for its time, ultimately amounted to a tunnel history of US strategic thinking. It left the social and cultural lanes of the US history underexplored and, thus, failed to include "America" in its story of the American way of war. Any analysis of the American way of thinking about war over the twentieth century should include how America itself changed over that timeframe. With few exceptions, in fact, each of America's key strategic thinkers thought and wrote in a different America. Mahan's America, for instance, was "at war with itself" in sociocultural terms, a fact that sheds additional light on his conviction that sea power could unify and strengthen a people culturally and socially. Mitchell's America, by comparison, was as "reckless and confused" as was his solution to the country's future defense challenges, namely, creating a national air service headed by a single chief. His solution was, thus, less anomalous in character and more in tune with the times than one might think.

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In contrast, the America of Brodie, Osgood, Schelling, and Kahn coincided with that of Eccles and Wylie. It began in the 1950s, the "golden age" of the American middle class, and it ended with the political and social violence of the 1960s. The Watts riots of August 1965, which resulted in nearly three dozen deaths and $40 million in damage, unfolded within twenty miles of Brodie's RAND office in Santa Monica and his home in Pasadena, California. It should hardly be surprising, therefore, that Brodie and the other strategy intellectuals considered the sociocultural dimension of war to be too volatile to be permitted to influence US strategy, either directly or indirectly. Hence, they largely excluded it from, or marginalized it in, their theories. On the other hand, the military intellectuals had served among the public, alongside sailors and soldiers, in the Second World War, and consequently regarded the sociocultural or psychosocial dimension of warfare to be critical; they saw it as the reservoir of a nation's willingness to fight. As a result, their theories, though perhaps less sophisticated in some respects, were more comprehensive than those of the strategy intellectuals.

The America of Boyd and Lind was characterized by a period of "cultural malaise" following the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the economic downturn of the 1970s. They came to despise how the United States began to embrace multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s, which they perceived, through ultraconservative lenses, not as evidence of strength, but as both an error and an Achilles' heel. As operational artists, they explicitly identified a nation's sociocultural or psychosocial dimension as a center of gravity that could be attacked through "soft-power" and various nontraditional ways. While their early operational theories looked for ways to disrupt an opponent's armed forces psychologically, their later theories imagined how America itself might lose its willingness to fight due to the frictions caused by its racial, ethnic, religious, and gender differences. Their theories obviously reflected a certain paranoia. Nonetheless, they also drew from established techniques in psychological and information warfare, including those aimed at political and cultural subversion. In sum, this book endeavors to put America back into the story of American strategic thought, if only partially.

This book is structured as a chronicle of debates involving America's predominant ways of thinking about war. These disputes frequently revolved around sets of core principles, each supported at root by a different paradigm of war's nature. Principles, core principles especially, supplied both the weaponry and the turf for the battles over war's nature. Principles, of course, form an essential part of the grammar of war. They link theory to practice and, in some cases, become a formidable rival to war's logic.

Part I, "First Principles and Modern War," discusses the theories and underlying principles of Mahan and Mitchell. Mahan brought Jomini's three core principles – concentration, offensive action, and decision by battle – from the nineteenth into the twentieth century and applied them to naval strategy. Mitchell fashioned a concept of air or aeronautical strategy around the same core principles. These imperatives, moreover, typified the instincts of US military professionals for much of the twentieth century. An example is Adm. Ernest J. King who, in likening warfare to pugilism, affirmed the traditional model of war's nature, even as he endorsed Jomini's core principles: "No fighter ever won his fight by covering up," he once asserted; instead, the "winner hits and keeps on hitting even though he has to take some stiff blows in order to keep on hitting."[11] Another example is Gen. George C. Marshall who, despite the Allies' deficiencies in training and materiel in the early stages of the Second World War, repeatedly insisted the correct military strategy lay in taking the offensive as soon as possible, delivering a concentrated blow across the English Channel, and defeating the German army in a decisive battle.[12] The US military, like others, would never truly abandon these imperatives, even when it added other principles of war to its official doctrine.[13]

In addition, Part I reveals how Mahan and Mitchell, though separated by a generation, shared the same understanding of war's nature but saw war's character quite differently. Mahan put his faith in surface fleets and found the fledgling but expanding potential of aircraft and submarines unimpressive. Mitchell, in contrast, regarded surface fleets as obsolete and called for the aggressive expansion of airpower as the weapon of the future. In effect, each theorist began advocating a separate way of battle: the former surface-centric and the latter air-centric.

Part II, "The Revolt of the Strategy Intellectuals," describes the crystallization of America's way of policy. Based on misinterpretations of Clausewitz's *On War* and of the First and Second World Wars, the strategy intellectuals assumed armed conflict, by its nature, would escalate almost automatically to the maximum possible level of violence. Ergo, Brodie rejected the notion that military imperatives should ever guide strategy, especially in an era in which "second-strike" nuclear weapons could render concentration, offensive action, and decision by battle suicidal. In his view, the only way to restore the utility of military force was to ensure it served only limited aims. Osgood likewise insisted America's political leaders had to contain the aggressive instincts of the military as well as the explosive passions of the populace. His solution involved replacing the military's imperatives with a set of principles that

emphasized political control and close circumscription of all parameters of conflict.

Similarly, Schelling's principle of bargaining – which presupposed a shared process of arriving at tacit and explicit agreements – offered an antithesis to traditional military imperatives. The bargaining principle implied commanders might need to exercise restraint just as they were gaining the upper hand, an idea that military leaders like Ernest King would have found ridiculous. Ironically, the bargaining principle also introduced greater uncertainty into strategic thinking, even as it sought transparency and stability, because tacit agreements can be broken without warning, or might never have existed in the first place. For his part, Kahn agreed military instincts needed to be curbed, and he attempted to counter uncertainty by arguing, largely in vain, that escalation itself was also a bargaining process with systematic waystations or steps imbedded along its path. Due to the fact their revolt struck at the US military's foundational strategic principles, therefore, the strategy intellectuals were anything but irrelevant to the American way of thinking about war, as some scholars have claimed.[14] Unfortunately, over time, America's way of policy allowed its grasp of the intricacies of military technique – the essential linkage of concepts and capabilities – to slip, and thus it increasingly struggles to maintain credibility.

Part III, "The Counterrevolution of the Military Intellectuals," explains how Eccles, Wylie, and later Summers, all combat veterans, endeavored to mitigate the strategy intellectuals' rejection of military principles. In addition to urging more rigorous analysis in deciding what to remove and what to retain in the way of guidelines for military strategy, Eccles and Wylie also actively contributed to filtering the vacuous concepts and empty slogans then filling the US defense establishment's lexicon. For his part, Summers exposed the harmful effects of applying academic (and untested) strategic theories in Vietnam. Eccles and Wylie agreed the advent of nuclear weapons had altered the character of war sufficiently to necessitate establishing new guidelines for the use of military force. But Summers believed most armed conflicts would be fought below the nuclear threshold and, hence, he maintained the principles of war, which he regarded as timeless, were still sound guides for crafting military strategy. Eccles, Wylie, and Rosinski also developed a theory of "strategy as control," a concept that had the potential to synthesize America's two antithetical perspectives: its ways of battle and its way of policy. Regrettably, the theory's potential was and remains underappreciated.

Part IV, "The Insurrection of the Operational Artists," considers how interest in operational art increased with the steady progress of denuclearization during the post-Cold War era. Boyd, Lind, and

Warden constructed operational theories that returned to Jominian first principles, though in modified form. Each operational concept concentrated on disrupting the enemy's psychological and physical capacity to resist, collapsing them swiftly through offensive action, and doing so regardless of the political objective. Policy itself was not necessarily an evil. But it was ambiguous and often fickle – two qualities operational art found difficult to accommodate. In truth, operational art never "devoured" strategy, as some have argued.[15] It did, however, stage an insurrection of sorts that attempted to bring military strategy back to its core principles, and which effectively created a "policy free zone" wherein military professionals could hone their operational planning and decision-making skills without distraction. In the process, this insurrection opened the door to an anarchy of operational methods, each of which has been independently refined without considering the possibility of integrating it into a larger synthesis. That anarchy includes the various approaches to counterinsurgency – which themselves are not always inimical to the core principles of concentration, offensive action, and decision by battle – and which are also a form of operational art. Nevertheless, the "new counterinsurgency era" only emerged during the first decade of the twenty-first century and its relevant archives are not yet available; hence, it lies outside the scope of this study.[16]

The chapters that follow describe the ideas of each of these theorists in more detail. They identify the core principles that defined an individual's major concepts as well as the assumptions about war's nature that supported those concepts. For most of the twentieth century, readers will note, the debates among the traditional, modern, materialist, and political models of war's nature made up the American way of thinking about war, even as they divided it.