Introduction

Between annihilation and restraint

If we are to learn from the past then history must first be understood on its own terms. One general point worth emphasizing [is], namely that each society and culture tends to have a unique view of warfare which affects how they fight and as a result how they may be beaten.

Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Fall of Carthage*

Since its foundation as a republic in the eighteenth century, the United States has faced two broad imperatives: to be an example of liberty to the world and to maintain this role and protect itself by achieving absolute security. How the United States tries to balance these imperatives and the resulting tensions, particularly when it is engaged in armed conflict or perceives an immediate threat, is the purpose of this book.

We argue that the United States has often relied on science, especially applied science, to reconcile these two ends. As Auguste Comte wrote, "from science comes prevision, from prevision comes control."[1] Taking this maxim to heart, science has been seen as the key to controlling war, allowing the United States to achieve overwhelming and quick military victories, which are nevertheless relatively humane and worthy of its core liberal values. This is a reflection of America's Enlightenment roots, with its faith in rationality and science to solve complex problems through understanding the natural world.

Improving war fighting is, of course, something that many, if not most, political units have sought to do in modern times. However, there are two aspects that make the American experience unique. First, it has the manpower, resources and the capability to develop technologies

[1] Ian T. King, *Social Science and Complexity: The Scientific Foundations* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2000), p. 20.

that have allowed it to have the most powerful and advanced army on the planet. In terms of military technology, it is unrivaled.

But second, as a liberal country, this ability to develop technology and apply it to warfare is tempered by certain political imperatives and limitations. Other attempts to perfect war in history, notably "total war" by Nazi Germany, have been done in an illiberal manner, sacrificing basic freedoms and many of the established international customs of war. The United States, however, has typically remained inside a liberal framework when it comes to the waging of war. While it cannot be denied that the United States has frequently gone to war in the name of liberal values (and that those conflicts have been waged with determination and harshness), those liberal values, and the checks and balances those values saw built into the American political process, ensure that a "total war" mindset cannot take root. It is these two factors that make the American experience unique and its prowess and engagement in the world worthy of consideration.

Yet, historically, the systematic application of science to warfare has often resulted in more brutality rather than less. Although the application of science to war was often intended as a way to find quicker, more direct paths to battle and to a decisive, humane outcome, the outcome has frequently been the opposite – and sometimes horrifically so. During World War I technology helped to prolong the conflict. The tactics employed by the generals had not kept pace with industrial achievements, and developments in technology caused the war to drag on in stalemate, rather than result in overwhelming victory. Further, the deployment of technology saw the gruesome deaths of millions on the battlefield. For example, although chemical weapons were touted as the superweapon that would quickly and easily bring an end to the bloodshed, the deaths and injuries to thousands on the battlefield quickly put this belief to rest.

Yet, in the face of what might be considered some damning evidence, the belief that scientific solutions could reconcile the demand for quick and clean wars continued throughout the twentieth century and today, especially in the United States. Why?

Achieving rapid victory is believed to be especially important in modern-day democratic systems where the will of the people can be fickle, especially in protracted conflicts. Academic scholarship has traditionally argued that a democratically elected leader must account for the fact that the public will weigh the costs of war

against the benefits.[2] Yet, studies have indicated that the public tends not to make complex cost–benefit calculations. Instead, Adam Berinsky argues that when policy elites are united the public tends to give politicians leeway to war, but when elites are in conflict, public support for the war also tends to split, constraining policy options.[3] When the public is behind an elite-supported war, democracies can be very war-prone.[4] The common denominator nevertheless remains that in a pluralistic, democratic society the government is ultimately more constrained than in a dictatorship. The dictator can fight a war of duration with far less concern for public sentiment or the criticism of other elites. Democracies, when they choose to go to war, are therefore governed by an overriding logic to pursue a strategy in war that makes the most of the means available to achieve a decisive and overwhelming victory as quickly as possible.[5] The United States has been particularly influenced by this political reality.

Further, the American understanding of war falls into a Western tradition, defined most succinctly by Clausewitz, as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[6] The Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius conceived of war as "the condition of those contending by force as such" where force equates to "armed force." War, importantly for Grotius, was a condition, not a competition, striking at the heart of Cicero's concept of war as "a contending by force."[7] A little more nuance might add that war is the collective use of force by an actor to

[2] Jack Levy, "Domestic Politics and War," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1988), 653–673; Sigmund Scott Gartner, "The Multiple Effect of Casualties on Public Support for War: An Experimental Approach," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (January 2008), 95–106; T. Clifton Morgan and Sally Howard Campbell, "Domestic Structure, Decisional Constraints and War: So Why Kant Democracies Fight?, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (June 1991), 187–211.

[3] Adam J. Berinsky, "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites and American Public Support," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (November 2007), 975–997.

[4] Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), 5–38.

[5] David A. Lake, "Power Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (March 1986), 24–37.

[6] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans.) (London: Random House, 1993), p. 83.

[7] Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp. 5–6.

achieve a specific goal.[8] Quincy Wright, in his 1942 *A Study of War*, explicitly adds a legal dimension drawing on a long tradition of law in war. Wright wrote that, "war is seen to be a state of law and a form of conflict involving a high degree of legal equality, of hostility, and of violence in the relations of organized human groups, or, more simply, the legal condition which equally permits two or more hostile groups to carry on a conflict by armed force."[9] Wars can be fought between two or more states, but wars can also be fought within a state (civil war) and between a state and a non-state/sub-state group challenging the authority of the state through the use of organized violence (guerrilla war/insurgency). War is an exception from regular politics and is possessed of a singular focus.

Western warring is often an extension of the idea of state politics, rather than a mere effort to obtain territory, personal status, wealth or revenge. Western militaries put a high premium on individualism. Within open democratic societies the military is subject to criticism and civilian complaint that may improve, rather than erode, war-making ability. The idea of annihilation, of head-to-head battle that destroys the enemy, seems a particularly Western concept largely unfamiliar to the ritualistic fighting and emphasis on deception and attrition found outside Europe. Westerners, in short, long ago saw war as a method of doing what politics cannot, and thus are willing to obliterate rather than check or humiliate any who stand in their way.[10]

Although war is a continuation of politics through exceptional means, it is, for Hedley Bull, one of the accepted "institutions" of the "Anarchical Society."[11] That is to say it is an accepted activity in world politics that is defined by both norms and laws mutually agreed upon by states in the international system. Bull's conception of war is the Western model, and the anarchical society he postulates is one based on Western norms that have been imposed on the rest of the world. The sole goal of war in the Western model is to win. The pursuit of war for any other reason than victory is antithetical to the concept

[8] See also: Lawrence Freedman (ed.), "General Introduction," in *War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 1.
[9] Wright, *Study of War*, p. 7.
[10] Victor Davis Hanson, *Why the West has Won: Nine Landmark Battles in the Brutal History of Western Victory* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 20.
[11] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

of *raison d'état*, which is an essential part of the modern state.[12] War is therefore perceived as an explicitly political and conscious act, rather than a cultural expression or existential action. In the Western world, historically, the ultimate aim of war is the imposition of one's will over the will of one's opponent.

Culture and the ways of warfare

With this background, we can see that the modern military culture of the United States is directly shaped by the imperative of decisive victory and the narrative myths of the military's role in the building of the United States since the establishment of the republic in 1776. And as one might expect, American military culture is extremely important in how the United States wages war. This study is focused on the American way of warfare, which must be defined separately from "warfare." Warfare, as Christopher Coker notes, "has no battles, has no heroes, and no memorials. It is without strategic or tactical innovation."[13] War on the other hand is a political act. Recalling Clausewitz war can be understood as the implementation of force to achieve a political objective that cannot be settled by non-violent means due to a failure of normal politics and diplomacy between states. Warfare over time evolved into what today is recognized as war.

How a country wages war reflects "who" that country is and we believe that how America wages war is understood through the prism of culture. But what do we mean by "American military culture"? Although scholars often write as if a country were possessed of one, singular and unified foreign policy culture, this is not adequate to capture the complexity of modern societies. We conceptualize culture as a "tool kit" of practices. This approach is heavily influenced by sociology, rather than the positivist approaches within much international relations (IR) scholarship. Within sociology there has been less of a focus on separating culture as practice (behavior) and culture as ideas. Within the study of international relations, in particular within the US academy, there has been an effort to separate behavior

[12] Antoine Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (London: Hurst, 2009).
[13] Christopher Coker, *Warrior Geeks: How 21st Century Technology is Changing the Way we Fight and Think about War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 41.

and ideas so that culture may be conceptualized as an intervening variable to explain behavior rather than being behavior.[14] We find this approach problematic for two reasons. First, as Jeremy Black rightly points out, "model based approaches that emphasize apparently scientific analysis, and that are designed to demonstrate universal laws" are insufficient because they "focus on a limited and readily defined group of conflicts and military systems."[15] Such approaches are more about developing theory than they are about understanding reality – we are interested in reality not theory.

Studies equating culture explicitly with values fail to explain why certain cultural practices endure even when the values that promoted the development of a culture change. Take modern-day northern Europe as an example of this. Across northern Europe today religion is largely absent from life, with 48 percent of EU citizens identifying themselves as atheists.[16] Even those that identify with a religion tend not to actually "practice" their faith in the traditional fashion of church attendance. Nonetheless, the Protestant work ethic identified by Max Weber remains rooted in northern European societies. Scholars equating culture directly with values (either within IR or sociology) have

[14] David Elkins and Richard Simeon, "A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?" *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1979), 127–145; Colin S. Gray, "National Style in Strategy: The American Example," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall 1981); David R. Jones, "Soviet Strategic Culture," in Carl G. Jacobsen (ed.), *Strategic Power: USA/USSR* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 35–49; Bradley S. Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April 1988), 133–148; Andrew M. Pettigrew, "On Studying Organizational Cultures," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Dec. 1979); Richard Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War," *Quadrant*, Vol. 21, No. 9 (Sept. 1977); Howard Schuman and Michael Johnson, "Attitudes and Behavior," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 2 (1976), available at: www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.001113; Jack Snyder "The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Options," RAND 1977, available at: www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2005/R2154.pdf and "Anarchy and Culture: Insights from the Anthropology of War," *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Winter 2002), available at: http://ir.rochelleterman.com/sites/default/files/snyder%202002.pdf (all accessed July 1, 2014).

[15] Jeremy Black, *War and the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 19.

[16] Eurobarometer 225, "Social Values, Science and Technology." June 2005. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_225_report_en.pdf (accessed on December 31, 2012).

no way to explain this phenomenon. The example of northern Europe and the endurance of the Protestant work ethic offers clear evidence that values and culture are not directly linked to each other, and that conceiving of culture as an ideational variable that impacts behavior is as lacking in explanatory power as approaches equating behavior with culture. We therefore find the approach to culture as "practice" developed by Ann Swindler more convincing than the pseudo science of political "science" and we utilize her approach to inform our historical inquiry.

Ann Swindler's conceptualization of culture as a "tool kit" composed of "symbols, stories, rituals and world views" from which actors choose familiar pathways applied in new ways to solve new problems is a more suitable framework for analysis. From this tool kit, "strategies of action" – a persistent ordering of action over time – are constructed.[17] In this sense, culture does not define the ends of action; instead it provides the components that are used to construct strategies of action. These strategies may continue to exist, long after the values that once shaped them have withered away or evolved. As Remi Hajjar argues, this approach to culture differs from functionalist and other approaches to culture in that it "includes a contested, fragmented and coherent, and contradictory and complementary nature, which bears postmodern qualities."[18] Culture in this study is both "enabling" and "constraining."[19] Using culture as an analytical device in such a manner allows us to avoid the determinist and Orientalist approach to culture and warfare evident in other studies of warfare. This is idiographic, and, like Patrick Porter, we argue against the neo-realist idea of "strategic man" where culture has no explanatory role – but concurrently we reject the cultural determinism embodied within much of the political science scholarship on culture.[20] Most notably, practice theory allows

[17] Ann Swindler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 1986), 273–286.

[18] Remi M. Hajjar, "Emergent Postmodern US Military Culture," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (January 2014), p. 119. See also: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989); Amy Zalmon, "Waging the First Postmodern War," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Winter 2006).

[19] Japonica Brown-Saracino and Amin Ghaziani, "The Constraints of Culture: Evidence from the Chicago Dyke-March," *Cultural Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (March 2009), 55.

[20] Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 19.

us to understand how a Western tradition of warfare has endured despite substantial breaks over prolonged periods of time in Western history, and how it has come to influence the American understanding and practice of warfare.

Although we argue that military culture is an important variable in how the United States wages war, it is vital to remember that it is civilian policy-makers that set the framework within which military doctrine is composed. While these civilian policy-makers do not determine the specifics of military doctrine, they do set the parameters within which such discussion occurs, especially when it comes to limits on the military through the imposition of strategic-level policy and constraints on spending. As Elizabeth Kier argues, "the interaction between the constraints set in the domestic political arena and the military's organizational culture shapes the choice between offensive and defensive military doctrines."[21]

To understand why a military behaves in a certain fashion, one must analyze the basic assumptions, symbols, stories and formal knowledge that make up the shared collective understanding of the organization, more commonly referred to as culture. And one must look at the various ways in which the different cultures of practice embodied in different communities ultimately affect foreign policy and strategy. Therefore, to understand the contemporary American way of warfare, one must understand that the culture of the American military is not the sole determinant of how the United States fights wars. We believe that one must augment an argument that focuses only on military culture as the primary variable determining tactics and strategy on the ground in combat operations. Otherwise, such an approach is too simplifying to properly understand how the United States fights modern wars and in particular *why* it fights them in a specific manner.

Colin Kahl utilized this approach in his essay titled "In the Crossfire or the Crosshairs?" that tackled the tough question of US military conduct and civilian casualties in Iraq in the war that started in 2003.[22] Kahl argued against the belief that the US military purposefully and routinely violated the norms and laws of non-combatant immunity.

[21] Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 21.

[22] Colin H. Kahl, "In the Crossfire or the Crosshairs? Norms, Civilian Casualties and US Conduct in Iraq," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2007), 7–46.

Kahl believes, like us, that the problem lies in a paradox within US military culture between annihilation and restraint and the overwhelming application of force within lawful means.[23] Kahl does not explore, however, except in the most cursory detail, the impact of America's liberal political culture on the military, nor does he examine the role that civilians play in influencing, and setting the parameters for, military action.[24]

Thus a more nuanced account of American military culture, and its interaction with the dominant political culture of liberalism and the strategic culture of American policy elites, is necessary to develop a more complete picture of the "annihilation–restraint" paradox than explicated by Kahl. To understand how America has fought wars, and especially how America fights wars today, one must view the process as an interaction between civilian and military parts of government.

Key terms

Before continuing further, it is important to explain just what we mean when we invoke some of the key terms used in this book – liberalism, annihilation, restraint and science.

Liberalism and law

For the purpose of this book, liberalism is understood to be a multifaceted doctrine that embraces free-marketers, social egalitarians, social reformers and those who seek to spread democracy abroad. Providing a precise definition of liberalism is a challenge, particularly in the case of the United States where it may be used to identify laissez-faire economic policies or to hurl a political insult at a candidate deemed as promoting a "nanny state." However, there are certain characteristics of liberalism that are shared among its many varieties and may be discussed. First and foremost, liberals detest tyranny and embrace individual rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of movement and the right to an elected government, property rights and equality before the law. It is a doctrine that loves and cherishes life, but will endorse the resort to force in order to protect liberal values and/or particular way of existence.

[23] Kahl, "In the Crossfire or the Crosshairs?", p. 6. [24] *Ibid*., pp. 38–39.

Liberalism lies at the foundation of the American Republic and its Enlightenment origins: the embrace of democratic values, individualism and freedom within the framework of the rule of law. As we argue in this book, this philosophical outlook has played a crucial role in the reasoning as to why Americans resort to military force, in shaping the way Americans have fought war and how they generally regard the phenomenon. Although many outside the United States regard the nation as militaristic with an oversized army, the truth is that in line with their liberal values Americans have historically mistrusted their armed forces.

Since the earliest days of the American Revolution, the United States has declared itself to be a nation of laws, including natural law, and holding "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind." If its revolution was to be legitimate, it had to be respected internationally and fought within the framework of the understood behavior of civilized states. The Founding Fathers believed that the United States must adhere to those liberal Enlightenment values through which it was claiming it had a right to exist. Naturally, this included those restraints on warfare understood as customary.

US engagement with restraints on the use of force, however, went beyond pragmatism. Consistent with liberalism is the idea that enlightened law can help improve the overall condition of humankind. As such, it is to no great surprise that the United States found itself spearheading or participating in many of the great international legal initiatives of the nineteenth century, particularly when it came to warfare. Whether it was producing the first written military manual on the laws of war in 1863 (General Orders 100, also known as the Lieber Code) or its drive to establish an international court through which disputes between states might be settled peacefully (at the 1899 Hague Conference), America has frequently and eagerly worked to develop restraints on warfare consistent with its liberal values since the mid-nineteenth century.[25]

Annihilation

In this work annihilation should be understood as the ability to force one's opponent into full, unconditional surrender, or to eliminate them

[25] See Stephanie Carvin, *Prisoners of America's Wars: From the Early Republic to Guantanamo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), especially Chapter 2.