

## The New Art of War

Many of war's lethal failures are attributable to ignorance caused by a dearth of contemporary, accessible theory to inform warfighting, strategy, and policy. To remedy this problem, Colonel Geoffrey F. Weiss offers an ambitious new survey of war's nature, character, and future in the tradition of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz. He begins by melding philosophical and military concepts to reveal war's origins and to analyze war theory's foundational ideas. Then, leveraging science, philosophy, and the wisdom of war's master theorists, Colonel Weiss presents a genuinely original framework and lexicon that characterizes and clarifies the relationships between humanity, politics, strategy, and combat; explains how and why war changes form; offers a methodology for forecasting future war; and ponders the permanence of war as a human activity. *The New Art of War* is an indispensable guide for understanding human conflict that will change how we think and communicate about war.

GEOFFREY F. WEISS is an active duty colonel with over twenty-seven years of service in the United States Air Force. He is a graduate of the US Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting and a distinguished graduate of the National War College. A former wing commander with multiple tours in the Middle East, Colonel Weiss is presently serving in the Pentagon on the Joint Staff where he advises the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on global operations and crisis response from the National Military Command Center.

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Geoffrey F. Weiss  
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# The New Art of War

*The Origins, Theory, and Future of Conflict*

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Colonel Geoffrey F. Weiss



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For my parents, Rick (1939–2019) and Marylou, who have lived life as a harmony of tensions, sometimes at war, mostly at peace, often on my mind, and always in my heart.

&

For those who risk their lives for others.

*If you wish to see the truth, then hold no opinions for or against anything . . . as long as you remain in one extreme or the other you will never know Oneness.*<sup>1</sup>

Buddhist Proverb

*The truth is the Whole.*<sup>2</sup>

Georg W. F. Hegel

The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Air Force, Department of Defense, or the US Government.

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## Preface

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*The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.*<sup>1</sup>

Taoist Proverb

For many, war is an abstraction, a curiosity. For others, it is part of a daily struggle for existence. For still others, it is a livelihood or even an aspiration. But what do we really *know* about war, and why does it matter? In the late 1960s, my father, who due to health reasons never experienced war firsthand, named me after his friend and mentor, Geoffrey Reginald Gilchrist Mure, Warden of Merton College, Oxford (1947–63). Frederick, my father’s first name, is also my middle name. Ironically, “Geoffrey” originates from the Old German word for “peace,” and “Frederick” means “peaceful ruler,” yet I have devoted most of my professional life and this book to the subject of war.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps no one understands fire or disease better than the fireman or physician, professionals dedicated to battling these menaces. The same is often true of warriors and war. And though some warriors are enamored with war, I am no more a fan of it than a doctor is a lover of disease or death. Still, how can we hope to prevent wars or prevail in wars thrust upon us without understanding war? I love peace enough to fight for it, which is why I devoted the majority of my life to military service and ultimately why I wrote this book. *The New Art of War* has been many years in the making, and its creation has been a rewarding though unlikely journey. Despite having settled on a military career (somewhat by accident), I never imagined I would write a book on war; after all, so much has been written already. Yet, the more I have studied history, war theory, and strategy the more I perceived a pressing need for a fresh approach. The result is *The New Art of War*.

### The Problem

As I stated, I had never intended to write a book on war. However, there are troubling deficiencies within the current body of war theory and consequently in our approach to strategy and warfighting. War is dangerous, unpredictable, and deadly. It has claimed hundreds of millions of lives, decimated landscapes,

and left countless nations, civilizations, and empires in its wake.<sup>3</sup> War is *not* a phenomenon anyone should engage in without knowing its nature.

### Clear as Mud

In *A History of Military Thought* (2001), historian and war expert Azar Gat writes, “New and significant intellectual constructions usually emerge at times of fundamental change or paradigmatic shifts, when prevailing ways of interpreting and coping with reality no longer seem adequate.”<sup>4</sup> We face that reality now. The complex evolution of war, theory, and strategy, from the classical era to the present, has deposited layers of terms, concepts, and principles stacked like geological strata. As a result, getting at what we really need to know amounts to a laborious dig that, frankly, few have the patience or intellectual discipline for. Instead, most simply pick a few shiny items off the top or attempt to delve deeper into material they do not fully understand. Unfortunately, this state of affairs has caused us to accept some theoretical shortfalls and blinded us to others. Solving these problems and accelerating our understanding of war into the present age demands a holistic reassessment of war theory and strategy. This alone will enable us to resolve the following deficiencies: (1) the inaccessibility of existing theory; (2) the incoherent language and explanation of war’s forms; and (3) the lack of contemporary theory development.

Regarding the first, though ample theory is available, its presentation complicates comprehension and application. Ancient origins, disparate styles, and myriad interpretations impede the direct application of traditional war theories to military operations and strategy. As historian Hew Strachan observes, “Strategic theory has therefore failed to provide the tools with which to examine the conflicts which are in hand.”<sup>5</sup> This has led some warfighters to misunderstand or misapply war theory, which can cause more harm even than ignoring it. As warrior-theorist Sir Basil Henry (B. H.) Liddell Hart writes, “Misinterpretation has been the common fate of most prophets and thinkers in every sphere. Devout but uncomprehending disciples have been more damaging to the original conception than even its prejudiced and purblind opponents.”<sup>6</sup> This undermines trust in otherwise sound theory and frustrates analysis by blurring the line between theoretical defects and execution errors.

History’s foremost war theorists are Sun Tzu, Thucydides, and Carl von Clausewitz, a triumvirate responsible for what war and strategy expert Colin Gray calls war’s “strategic canon.”<sup>7</sup> These savants formulated theory based on scholarship, experience, and astute reasoning. Their writings are profoundly perceptive on war and human nature; yet, they are easily misunderstood. Clausewitz is the most difficult. As Liddell Hart opines of Clausewitz’s “opacity”: “It must be admitted . . . that Clausewitz invited misinterpretation more than most,” and “not one reader in a hundred was likely to follow the subtlety of

his logic or to preserve a true balance amid such philosophical jugglery.”<sup>8</sup> Adds historian and Clausewitz expert Peter Paret:

It is not surprising that the search for Clausewitz’s influence . . . has been confused and inconclusive . . . if we examine the conduct of war since Clausewitz wrote, we will find little evidence that soldiers and governments have made use of his theories . . . nothing has proved more elusive to discover than an application of “lessons” learned from *On War*.<sup>9</sup>

Clausewitz’s theory is puzzling for two main reasons. First, he died of cholera before finishing *On War*, leaving his wife to collect and publish his notes posthumously. Second, the incongruity of Clausewitz’s dialectic style obscures his conclusions. As Gat writes, “Perplexed by the contradictory ideas they have found in *On War* and failing to follow Clausewitz’s tortuous intellectual development . . . commentators could never really make up their minds what exactly Clausewitz meant to say.”<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War* is more straightforward and more history than theory, a chronicle of the sprawling conflict he witnessed and participated in. Even so, the book’s remarkable detail can distract readers from the timeless insights into human nature found more in orations and dialogue than battle accounts. Finally, Sun Tzu’s work, *The Art of War*, is the most readable, yet also the easiest to dismiss as fortune-cookie mysticism due to its aphoristic simplicity. However, just as the brushstrokes of a master artist may seem unremarkable outside the context of the completed portrait, Sun Tzu’s wisdom and relevance can be missed by readers who fail to approach his ideas holistically.

The challenge of grasping these theorists is compounded by a second deficiency, the general incoherence of the vast, diverse body of interpretation and commentary they have engendered. “What’s wrongheaded” in this explosion of perspectives, writes the Heritage Foundation’s Jay Carafano, is the “presumption . . . that, just as farmers must plow the fields and rotate crops every year to get better results, so military thinkers must turn over fundamental military concepts on a regular basis.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, Carafano adds, “More military thinking doesn’t lead inevitably to better thinking. Indeed, lately it seems to have put more trees in front of the forest.”<sup>12</sup> This unending tug-of-war between supporters and critics creates confusion that discourages warriors and strategists from embracing war theory. Competing opinions amplified by the relentless pressure to uncover some revolutionary new nugget from the strata of history and war theory have yielded a plethora of hastily defined terms that impede clear thought, especially for the intellectually intensive art of strategy. For instance, according to Strachan, words like “asymmetric” and “hybrid” lack “either definition or clarity” and reflect “the weakness of war’s conceptual vocabulary.”<sup>13</sup> To borrow from the Clausewitzian lexicon, the current language of war theory creates cognitive friction that fogs our understanding of war’s

nature. Clausewitz disparaged the theory of his day, calling it “an ostentatious exhibition of ideas” attended by a “retinue of jargon, technicalities, and metaphors” that posed a “serious menace” if accepted uncritically.<sup>14</sup> Is it any different today?

Clausewitz rightly advises us to critique the language of war, and we should do the same for theory. Has war theory answered all the questions we need it to? In fact, there are many war-related questions that remain inadequately addressed. For example, why do we lack a common definition for war that clearly establishes how war differs from other forms of human violence and competition? How are war and human nature related? How do we distinguish between war’s nature and character? How are domain (e.g., maritime and air) and small wars theories related to general war theory? Why is war terminology so unsystematic? For instance, though there are no rigorously defined properties of “regularity” or “conventionality,” we routinely deem wars “irregular” and “unconventional.” Moreover, how are war’s forms (e.g., regular, irregular, and hybrid) related, and how and why do they change? Finally, why has war theory not proposed a methodology for forecasting future war nor settled the question of war’s permanence in human affairs?

Answering these important questions requires better theory, and this leads to a third problem: writing war theory is a lost art. While there is ample war-related authorship, including theory interpretation and application, where is the original theory *development*? Amazingly, according to war scholars Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, even the central text used in the war studies department at London’s King’s College provides “almost nothing in the way of either definitions or theories of war.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, “if something is so important that we cannot understand anything in human affairs without it, either there should be a battery of theoretic approaches, as in any other serious field of social and political inquiry, or developing such approaches should be the first order of business.”<sup>16</sup> Instead, asserts Gray, “There are no new ideas in strategy. Most generations produce a few scholars, former strategic practitioners, and popular writers who attempt to update the classics for a better fit with contemporary realities. But the results of their labors are invariably disappointing.”<sup>17</sup> Why?

### **Is There a Theorist in the House?**

*The fact that no modern writers have managed to rise to [Thucydides’s and Clausewitz’s] level of sophistication and understanding of the place of war in human affairs is indeed a sad commentary on the intellectual depth of the present age.*<sup>18</sup>

Williamson Murray

The renowned military strategist Bernard Brodie attributes some of this to qualification. In his foreword to *On War*, Brodie writes, “While genius has scarcity value in every field of human endeavor, in the field of strategic writing it has special rarity. The reason is that soldiers are rarely scholars, and civilians are rarely students of strategy.”<sup>19</sup> Rare is the soldier-scholar or professor-strategist with the balance of education, ability, and inclination to become a theorist, and the prospects for a breakthrough in any field are generally proportional to the number of people engaged. Those few who show promise are too often content to be derivative theorists (i.e., creatively repackaging past principles versus deriving new theories).

Ignorance or inexperience with theory composition are also factors contributing to the dearth of theorists. In his theory construction primer, Paul Reynolds says:

The major factor that thwarts the development of a scientific body of knowledge of social and human phenomena [like war theory] is the character of social scientists themselves. Two major deficiencies are lack of clarity in theoretical writings and ignorance about what scientific knowledge should look like and how it is created.<sup>20</sup>

These deficiencies have often led to ambiguous writing that, according to Reynolds, has “all the clarity and precision of an astrology prediction or political speech.”<sup>21</sup> A likely cause for this competence gap is the rarity within traditional academic institutions of programs established for the study of war and military history, genres that remain outside the mainstream of academic vogue. Even dating back to the early twentieth century and Hans Delbrück, arguably the father of modern military history, military historians were seen as “misfits,” reflecting a belief that “war is an aberration in the historical process,” a trivial “bi-product” of world history.<sup>22</sup> By the twenty-first century, the academy had largely supplanted the practically focused examination of military, political, and economic histories in favor of modish social and cultural themes.

Also contributing to the scarcity of war theorists is the domination of liberal-progressive viewpoints on university faculties. Liberal-progressive ideology tends to marginalize the importance of war and military topics, which are viewed as male-dominated, conservative subject areas, and thus, the reprehensible drivel of the oppressor class.<sup>23</sup> Historian John Lynn says of military historians, “We used to be condemned because we were believed to be politically right-wing, morally corrupt, or just plain dumb.”<sup>24</sup> While not all military historians are shunned, they are a rare species. A 2008 *US News and World Report* article asserts:

The field that inspired the work of writers from Thucydides to Winston Churchill is, today, only a shell of its former self. The number of high-profile

military history experts in the Ivy League can be counted on one hand. Of the more than 150 colleges and universities that offer a Ph.D. in history, only a dozen offer full-fledged military history programs.<sup>25</sup>

Given these circumstances, many aspiring historians pursue their professional goals in other directions. Of those brave souls who stay the course, most specialize in decoding the truth about specific incidents, epochs, or locations rather than attempting to become strategists or theorists.<sup>26</sup> Military history, though vital to theory, is less pragmatic. Its purpose, says Lynn, is “not practical in any immediate sense; rather it is to achieve, or at least strive for, an understanding of the past as a value unto itself.”<sup>27</sup> Still, history is an essential data source theorists and strategists cannot afford to ignore. Regrettably, writes Brodie, “our own generation is unique, but sadly so, in producing a school of thinkers who are allegedly experts in military strategy and who are certainly specialists in military studies but who know virtually nothing of military history.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, since good strategy must consider both history and theory, doubly inept are the “strategists” who know little of either.

Great war theorists are even rarer than military historians or strategists. In addition to a deep knowledge of war, becoming an effective theorist requires audacity. As legendary author and intellectual Isaac Asimov writes:

The history of human thought would make it seem that there is difficulty in thinking of an idea even when all the facts are on the table. Making the cross-connection requires a certain daring. It must, for any cross-connection that does not require daring is performed at once by many and develops not as a “new idea,” but as a mere “corollary of an old idea.”<sup>29</sup>

A war theorist must combine the attributes of a detective, historian, philosopher, warrior, and strategist to analyze historical data, experience, and past theory and then make “daring” “cross-connections” that reveal new insights. Theoretical development of this complex phenomenon requires a broad, multi-disciplinary, holistic perspective. “In war more than in any other subject,” writes Clausewitz, “we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole.”<sup>30</sup> This contrasts with modern academia that frequently values narrow specialization, making scholarship an exercise in learning more and more about less and less. Indeed, as Barkawi and Brighton point out in their conclusion to *The Changing Character of War* (2011), “War is strangely decentered and fragmented as an object of inquiry . . . [and] attention has been fixed on particular wars rather than war as a general force.”<sup>31</sup>

Warrior-historians are often best qualified to be theorists, and they have produced great work advancing the art and science of warfighting. But they also tend to accentuate historical case studies and lessons from recent events rather than probing war’s deeper intricacies. “They have too often sought to simplify



and build clear but irrelevant models,” writes military historian Williamson Murray, “in the face of what will always be a nightmarish world of complexity and difficulty.”<sup>32</sup> Of course, as a practical caste, warriors almost always prefer concrete solutions over flights of fancy down theoretical rabbit holes. Thus, most scholarship on warfare favors the physical over the metaphysical (i.e., how do we win today’s fight?). “That is one of the chief reasons why military people are so often disappointed with Clausewitz,” asserts Brodie, “for they are particularly accustomed in their training to absorbing against a tight schedule of time specific rules for conduct.”<sup>33</sup> Liddell Hart adds: “Great advances in medicine and surgery have been due more to the scientific thinker and research worker than to the practitioner. Direct experience is inherently too limited to form an adequate foundation either for theory or for application.”<sup>34</sup>

Given these circumstances, it is not uncommon for warriors and strategists to bypass theory, relying instead on the progeny of theory and experience: tactics and doctrine. But warriors who allow their warfighting doctrine to drift too far from its theoretical roots may sacrifice adaptability and foresight. “With such a limited basis,” writes Liddell Hart, “the continual changes in military means from war to war carry the danger that our outlook will be narrow and the lessons fallacious.”<sup>35</sup> In the absence of scientific theory, early humans used religion to explain otherwise mystifying occurrences. Ignorance of war theory causes a similar effect in military thought. Every few years, some “high priest” of war articulates a pithy slogan around which zealous acolytes build elaborate doctrines and taxonomies. Examples include “low intensity conflict,” “effects-based operations,” “net-centric” and “generational” warfare, and “infinite” war. While in fashion, these catchphrases attract widespread praise; but, outside a recent example or two, followers often struggle to explain *why*. Eventually, these “cults” fade away and are replaced by new ones as the original supporters depart and the character of war changes. This repeating cycle can cause practitioners to lose touch with theory entirely, a condition that courts disaster. Of the French in World War II, Liddell Hart says, their “vital weakness” lay “not in the quantity nor in quality of equipment, but in their *theory*. Their ideas had advanced less than their opponents . . . [and] as has happened so often in history, victory had bred a complacency and fostered an orthodoxy which led to defeat.”<sup>36</sup>

Militaries generally promote superior tacticians who, upon achieving higher rank, aspire to become strategists and advisors to political leaders. Tactical experts accustomed to disregarding theory are naturally less comfortable with it as they rise in rank and require a more comprehensive view of their craft. Once on a headquarters staff, where an understanding of war has the broadest effect, the constraints of personality, process, and politics and the relentless “tick-tock” of meetings and deadlines often preclude reflection on war’s true nature. Absent a conscious effort to embrace theory, leaders can struggle to become

effective strategists.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, the best way to appreciate theory is to study it, use it, and every so often, take a crack at creating it.

### Easier Said Than Done

*This kind of holistic thinking is rare precisely because it is so difficult.*<sup>38</sup>

General T. Michael Moseley, former US Air Force Chief of Staff

War's complexity is a key factor inhibiting theory development. Fittingly, "war" comes from the Old English "wyrre" meaning "to bring into confusion."<sup>39</sup> War is an intricate, chaotic phenomenon tied to the elusive depths of human nature. It is "not a chess game," writes counterinsurgency expert David Galula, "but a vast social phenomenon with an infinitely greater and ever-expanding number of variables, some of which elude analysis."<sup>40</sup> War, adds Murray, is "an incredibly complex endeavor which challenges men and women to the core of their souls. It is . . . not only the most physically demanding of all the professions, but also the most demanding intellectually and morally."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, as maritime theorist Julian Corbett opines, "war being . . . a complex sum of naval, military, political, financial, and moral factors, its actuality can seldom offer . . . a clean slate on which strategical problems can be solved by well-turned syllogisms."<sup>42</sup> This complexity may discourage aspiring war theorists by leading them to conclude that war and strategy *cannot* be expressed theoretically.

The final reason for the shortage of new war theory is the belief that nothing new *needs* to be said about war. To paraphrase patent clerk Charles Holland Duell, perhaps when it comes to war theory, "everything that can be invented has been invented."<sup>43</sup> In his 1883 book, *Das Volk im Waffen (The Nation in Arms)*, Prussian field marshal Colmar von der Goltz writes:

A military writer who after Clausewitz, writes upon war, runs the risk of being likened to the poet who, after Goethe, attempts a Faust, or, after Shakespeare, a Hamlet. Everything of any importance to be said about the nature of war can be found stereotyped in the works left behind by that greatest of military thinkers.<sup>44</sup>

This stance exemplifies what Nobel Laureate physicist Robert Laughlin calls an "antitheory," the idea that there is no absolute truth and "no fundamental thing left to discover . . . only a swarm of detail that belongs to no one."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, despite the overt problems with war theory, many experts agree with von der Goltz and focus only on interpreting and expounding upon past wisdom, restating or rearranging it to address specific problems or circumstances. Though often beneficial, these efforts have not produced the holistic interpretation of war we really need. Rare is that field of scholarship so clear

and uncontentious that it precludes gain from additional inquiry. War is undoubtedly *not* such a field. Moreover, as philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer says, “Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, while past theorists were visionary, they were still products of their respective eras. Now, aided by advances in history, mathematics, and science unknown to the likes of Sun Tzu, Thucydides, and Clausewitz, war theory is *exactly* the sort of subject for which a re-examination is not only warranted but explicitly needed.

### So What?

*If we are at war and we get the military strategy about right, people will be killed; if we get it wrong, lots of people will be killed.*<sup>47</sup>

General T. Michael Moseley

What are the implications if we refuse this challenge? As Sun Tzu warns, “War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.”<sup>48</sup> Problems with war theory can lead to disastrous miscalculations in strategy, warfighting, and diplomacy. “An error in my writings may easily be corrected without harming anybody,” writes Machiavelli, “but an error in their practice may ruin a whole state.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, “the cost of slovenly thinking at every level of war,” adds Murray, “can translate into the deaths of innumerable men and women . . . [and] also leads invariably to the massive waste of national treasure.”<sup>50</sup> A brief survey of war’s history reveals how painfully often political and military leaders have blundered. Even the mighty US war machine has not been immune. In a 2013 *Foreign Affairs* article, the US Deputy Defense Secretary, Ashton Carter, lamented:

At the outset of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Pentagon made two fatal miscalculations. First, it believed these wars would be over in a matter of months . . . second, the Pentagon was prepared for traditional military-versus-military conflicts. As a result, the military was not well positioned to fight an enemy without uniforms, command centers, or traditional organizational structures.<sup>51</sup>

Colin Gray attributes these miscues to deficiencies in theory saying, “looking back at the 2000s with particular reference to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq . . . the truth is that strategic theorists, the inventors and refurbishers of concepts, have failed in their duty to explain the nature and character of contemporary war and warfare adequately.”<sup>52</sup> War’s complexity, which seems to defy logic and foresight, can induce even seasoned leaders to adopt defective stratagems. Without theory’s guiding light, plans may be derived

exclusively from personal experiences, case studies, or proximate trends, in essence using the past as a template rather than a reference. As Clausewitz warns: “The danger is that this kind of style can easily outlive the situation that gave rise to it; for conditions change imperceptibly. That danger is the very thing a theory should prevent by lucid, rational criticism.”<sup>53</sup> Perhaps more insidiously, ignorance of theory can prevent us from spotting and discrediting bad theory. Contemporary war pundits are quick to proclaim brand-new forms of war or to declare that some innovation has altered war’s nature. But in fact, hybrid warfare is *not* new; aircraft, nuclear weapons, and the USSR’s collapse did *not* end war; and the twentieth century’s explosion of insurgencies has *not* relegated traditional warfare to history’s dustbin.

### The Solution

*It is only afterward that a new idea seems reasonable. To begin with, it usually seems unreasonable.*<sup>54</sup>

Isaac Asimov

When theory does not serve its purpose, we must reevaluate and, where appropriate, revise it. This is easier said than done; however, the place to start is at the beginning. A theory of anything must reflect the subject’s *nature*, which is determined by those constitutive elements and characteristics that establish its unique identity. Research and study help reveal these elements, thus increasing our depth of comprehension. Ideally, we prioritize research into areas that facilitate safety and well-being. Studying war, as we would disease, famine, or weather, improves our likelihood of avoiding war and mitigating its destructive effects.

According to Paul Reynolds, good theory provides the following benefits:

- (1) Typology: a method of organizing and categorizing “things”
- (2) *Predictions* of future events
- (3) *Explanations* of past events
- (4) A sense of *understanding* about what causes events
- (5) The potential for *control* of events<sup>55</sup>

In effect, proper theoretical treatment creates a common language with explicit definitions and abstract statements to explain the past, predict the future, and provide insight into causality. Given the right conditions, theory may even permit control. This process is apparent within the sciences, where research and discovery have led to amazing innovations like space travel, advanced medicine, and the Internet.

Though war differs from quantum mechanics or microbiology, it is equally if not more worthy of attention. In the sciences, research and experimentation provide data that forms the basis for theory, which may be expressed

mathematically or as a related set of definitions, principles, or axioms. Though its complexity precludes mathematical precision, war has enduring truths and governing principles that we can organize and express in theoretical form. War's "data" comes from a variety of sources including current events, logical deduction, exercises, experiments, and especially *history*. "Historical examples," writes Clausewitz, "clarify everything and also provide the best kind of proof in the empirical sciences. This is particularly true of the art of war."<sup>56</sup> Within this sea of information, which lamentably grows deeper every year, are the clues and themes necessary for theory development. But make no mistake, as political scientist Greg Cashman points out in *What Causes War?* (1993), "'The data never speak for themselves.' Without a theory there is no real explanation."<sup>57</sup> War's complexity substantiates an enduring premise: *no two wars are identical*; therefore, no past war can be a perfect model for a current or future war. Lessons from past or present wars provide glimpses into war's nature that only theory can aggregate into a concise, practical form. Theory also helps bridge the gap between the past and future by illuminating possible futures, a function critical for strategy, which is essentially an exercise in arranging present conditions and resources (ways and means) to yield favorable future outcomes (ends). Finally, theory aids resourcing and warfighting decisions. US Naval War College professor Milan Vego writes, "The commander armed with solid theoretical knowledge would have a firmer grasp of the sudden change of a situation and could act with greater certainty and quickness to obtain an advantage over the opponent."<sup>58</sup> Conversely, strategy and tactics that disregard or misapply theory or leverage defective theory face an *increased risk of failure*, especially when opposed by a competent adversary.

### The New Art of War

*Theories have four stages of acceptance:*

1. *This is worthless nonsense.*
2. *This is interesting, but perverse.*
3. *This is true, but quite unimportant.*
4. *I always said so.*<sup>59</sup>

J. B. S. Haldane

*The New Art of War* is the admittedly ambitious answer to theory's inaccessibility and incoherence as well as the lost art of theory development. It represents a decade-long exploration of war's nature, including its origins, theory, and future, and its scope exceeds most works in this genre. This is not a book of recommendations for a specific country or audience; instead, it seeks only to express war's universal truths in a useful form; to provide, as Strachan says, "a

common doctrine, a common way of thinking about war, and a common method of applying those thoughts in practice.”<sup>60</sup> The opening chapter’s examination of war’s human and metaphysical dimensions and formal definition – including war’s twenty dialectics and a new trinity centered on *humanity*, *politics*, and *combat* – set the stage for the analysis, development, and application of war theory in subsequent chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 highlight war’s enduring patterns and themes by summarizing and evaluating the seminal ideas of history’s master war theorists, including small wars and domain theory. Chapter 4 shapes these concepts into a general, *Unified War Theory* encompassing politics, strategy, and combat; updates the language of war; and redefines war’s forms (e.g., regular-irregular) as related elements of a continuum driven by iterative assessments of combatant will and fighting capacity. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a methodology for improving predictions regarding war’s future character and concludes with an evaluation of war’s permanence as a human activity.

I anticipate some resistance to *The New Art of War*. Those content with the status quo may hesitate to accept a new perspective that challenges entrenched ways of thinking. As Liddell Hart opines, “The direct assault of new ideas provokes a stubborn resistance, thus intensifying the difficulty of producing a change of outlook . . . [but] true conclusions can only be reached . . . by pursuing the truth without regard to where it may lead or what its effect may be – on different interests.”<sup>61</sup> But I welcome the debate, for if controversy accompanies new ideas in proportion to their consequence, then I should wish for plenty! Regardless, I expect this work will stimulate thought and prove beneficial to anyone irrespective of their experience. War experts will likely find affirmation of what they have always known or suspected but also some ideas they may not have considered, while neophytes will benefit from a holistic theory of war unavailable elsewhere. Ultimately, my hope for *The New Art of War* echoes that of Clausewitz, who said of *On War*: “It was my ambition to write a book that would not be forgotten after two or three years, and that possibly might be picked up more than once by those who are interested in the subject.”<sup>62</sup>

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As I highlight in Chapter 1, humans are social creatures. Sure, some prefer solitude; however, as the theme for *Cheers* croons, *sometimes you want to go, where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came*. Sharing life's challenges, in battle or book writing, enhances well-being and affords a wealth of life-enriching feedback and encouragement. This book would not have been possible without the contributions and support of family, friends, colleagues, and mentors over the years. I am most grateful to God and *fortuna* for life and the privilege of citizenship in a land that provides the freedom to pursue constructive dreams unimpeded by tyranny. I also have to thank my parents, Rick and Marylou, for blessing me with love and an intellectual inheritance that includes optimism, irrepressibility, and a philosophical spirit; and my wife, Karen, and three gifted children, Alison, Scott, and Brian, for their patience and input as I toiled seemingly forever on "the book." In addition to lending their edits and critiques, they inspire me daily. Other significant supporters include Wray Johnson, who opened my eyes to critical thinking, *Bildung*, and the broader phenomenon of war; Rick Glitz, my early editor-in-chief; Bruce Cooper, my algorithm czar; Alisen Boada, citations and sources guru; Generals Drew Poppas and Glen VanHerck, warrior-leaders and valued role models; my agent, Chris Kepner, who saw the whole elephant and not just the snake; and Michael Watson, Emily Sharp, Ruth Boyes, Raghavi Govindane, Ursula Acton, and the peerless Cambridge University Press for turning big ideas into books. Finally, I am forever indebted to the myriad unnamed colleagues and supporters who have shaped my thinking in (I hope) productive ways.

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