

1 | *What is strategy?*

Man made War in his own image.

(Willmott 2002: 14)

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

(Sidebottom 2004: 35)

Art of war or science of war, and technical definitions of ‘strategy’

‘Thinking war’: this is how the French sociologist Raymond Aron characterised Clausewitz’s work (Aron 1976). It is a conceptual challenge to write about the evolution of Strategy, especially with an emphasis on the social institutions, norms and patterns of behaviour within which it operates, the policies that guide it and the culture that influences it. For, as we shall see presently, the use of the word ‘strategy’ has changed very considerably over time. This book’s *main* purpose is *not* to provide a history of the word ‘strategy’ and all that it denoted over time. Instead, it will examine how people thought about the link between political aims and the use of force, or its threat, which we will refer to as Strategy with a capital ‘S’. This definition will be applied retrospectively to find out how strategists – writers on the conduct of war – thought about this issue in the past, whether or not they employed the actual term ‘strategy’, which after classical antiquity only came into use again around 1800.¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The articulation of different dimensions of Strategy

War as an instrument of politics

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

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

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

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

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

reflected on his profession and is not able quickly to apply the fruits of his reflections to actual cases. (Wagner 1809: viii)

Another was Clausewitz's colleague at the War Academy in Berlin, Otto August Rühle von Lilienstern (1780–1847), next to Clausewitz the most outstandingly original German-speaking writer of that generation. In his *Handbook for Officers* (published 1817–18), he argued that every war had a cause and a purpose which would

determine the character and the direction of all activity ... The individual operations have military purposes; the war as a whole always has a final political purpose, which means that war is undertaken ... in order to realise the political purpose upon which the State has decided.

According to Rühle, then, 'Every war and every [military] operation is based on a Wherefore? and Why?, a purpose and a cause, which will give a specific character and a definite direction to each of its actions' (Rühle 1818: 8). In the light of the Napoleonic Wars, and reflecting Vattel's concerns about the consequences of an unjust peace, Rühle concluded that

victory is not always the necessary condition of conquest or of peace, and peace is not always the necessary result of victory and conquest ... Each war has ... a main purpose, which, however, is not always ... peace. Peace can be seen merely as the termination of the state of war. The obstacle which in war obstructs the attainment of the main purpose is the enemy, and it has to be cleared out of the way. In the best case this may lead to victory, but for this reason alone, victory is not the main purpose of the war, but only a subordinate purpose within war. If somebody concludes a peace without attaining the main purpose ... he can be called the defeated party, however many battles he may have won, even if he has won all of them.

Writing with the Napoleonic conquests in mind, he added:

To the contrary, victory and conquest are often causes of the continuation, the renewal and the multiplication of war. Often, peace comes because none of the warring parties was able to defeat the other, and often war is not made in order to establish peace. (1818: 8f.)

Rühle pointed out the ambiguity of the term 'peace': is it merely the absence of war or the 'lasting friendly agreement of states among each

other'? He drew attention to instances in history when peace was concluded so as better to prepare for the next war, and to instances where war was continued and drawn out because at least one side sought to achieve some gains other than victory. There were wars which were fought to further the personal interests of individual 'officers and state officials, or the army; in short, of some subordinate interest, but not for the sake of the common well-being of the state' (Rühle 1818: 8f.). Victory – if defined as the attainment of such particular interests – cannot therefore be the main purpose, but must be subordinated to much greater aims, such as the aim of turning one's enemy into a friendly power (Rühle 1818: 11).

Moreover, in view of the political links and networks which all civilised [*kultivierte*] states entertain with one another, in all wars it is almost as important what impression the conduct and the results of the war have on the public opinion and the interest of the other temporarily neutral states, as what relationship the two warring parties have on account of the war [between them]. A temporary advantage, the early humiliation of the enemy, a conquest – however brilliant – are of little value for the state whose existence has to be calculated and secured for hundreds of years, if there is not the hope of keeping this advantage and the conquests for a long time, or if it creates the fear of a new, greater danger ... These concerns about public opinion and the political community of states are so important in determining the legal basis of war, and its essential usefulness, and explain why even very powerful states try at least to package their feuds in an acceptable way and accept limitations on their behaviour even in victory. (Rühle 1818: 12)

While many wars are fought for gains (*Nutzen*) or honour, as Rühle conceded, war *ought* to be only the means of states to obtain justice; 'according to the principles of morality, war should never be waged for any other purpose'. Unfortunately, who is in the right is not always clear, and

war is thus the way in which states settle their legal quarrels, in one word: their [clashing] political aims, against each other with the use of force. It is the attainment of these political aims, which are the true final war aims, not victory, peace or conquest, if these are not perchance in line with the political intention. The army is merely the acting organ, the executive of the higher will. The army's and its leaders' entire mental activity

should aim to tailor the individual operations, to combine and execute them in a way that their success may deflect any danger from their state, or give it political advantages. (Rühle 1818: 13)

In view of Rühle's far-sighted observations quoted above, which Clausewitz, as his colleague, must have been familiar with, it is ironic that it is usually Clausewitz who gets all the credit for articulating this link between politics and warfare, especially as in *On War* he deliberately desisted from spelling out the implications. It was Clausewitz's posthumous rival, Jomini, who devoted a considerable part of his *Summary of the Art of War* of 1837 to what he calls the 'politics of war', which he uses in a way that comes very close to my definition of Strategy. Jomini compares favourably with Clausewitz in that Jomini reflected explicitly on the relationship between politics and war, especially on the political motives that would lead to war. 'A government goes to war', he wrote,

To reclaim certain rights or to defend them; to protect and maintain the great interests of the state, [such] as commerce, manufactures, or agriculture; to uphold neighbouring states whose existence is necessary either for the safety of the government or the balance of power; to fulfil the obligations of offensive and defensive alliances; to propagate political or religious theories, to crush them ... or to defend them; to increase the influence and power of the state by acquisitions of territory; to defend the threatened independence of the state; to avenge insulted honor; or, from a mania of conquest. (Jomini 1837/1868: 14)

Jomini divided wars into several categories, explaining that these different types of war required different ways of waging them. The categories were:

- 'Offensive wars to reclaim rights', which he regarded as 'the most just war[s]', even though they would normally be waged on territory at that stage held by the enemy (hence 'offensive', involving the invasion of somebody else's territory).
- Wars that were politically defensive, but 'offensive in a military point of view'. This would include pre-emptive wars, wars in which one attacked an enemy anticipating an attack by him. Jomini was convinced, however, that a defensive war carried out on one's own territories held great advantages, as it would have the support of the

population, a well-known theatre of operations and help from all the local authorities (Jomini 1837/1868: 17).

- ‘Wars of expediency’, to snatch something from an adversary who happened to be going through a time of weakness or disarray. What he had in mind was Frederick the Great’s seizure of Silesia (Jomini 1837/1868: 18).
- ‘Wars with or without allies’.
- ‘Wars of intervention’ in the ‘internal affairs of a neighbouring state’.
- ‘Aggressive war for Conquest and other Reasons’ à la Genghis Khan, which could be ‘a crime against humanity’ [*sic*], even though Jomini thought that ‘it is better to attack than to be invaded’ (Jomini 1837/1868: 23).
- ‘Wars of opinion’ or what we would call ideological wars (such as the war between Revolutionary France and its adversaries, and, looking beyond Jomini’s own times, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, or many conflicts of the Cold War pitting communists against non-communists).
- ‘National wars’, by which he meant wars of resistance against foreign invasion involving the mobilisation of the entire people, with the wars of resistance and liberation against Napoleon’s forces in mind. He had personal experience of the Spanish War of Liberation of 1808–12, which he had experienced as particularly dreadful, using the expression ‘wars of extermination’ to describe them, when Spanish insurgents wiped out – exterminated – whole French units in ambushes and night attacks (Jomini 1837/1868: 29–35).
- ‘Civil Wars, and Wars of Religion’.

He stressed that each of these wars had to be waged differently – in ‘wars of opinion’, ‘national wars’ and ‘civil wars/wars of religion’ the rabble was involved in a way in which it was not in ‘wars of expediency’. His categories overlap in places; a defensive war might not be distinguishable from what he called ‘national wars’ as he saw these as defensive. Nevertheless, Jomini’s categorisation goes a long way to take political aims into account as chief variable determining the character of any Strategy.

That one’s conduct of war should be governed by politics was a disputed concept, however. Lossau in his handbook stated apodictically

that where politics ‘ceases to have its effects, war starts’. Politics only decides the moment when peace yields to war. At least he conceded that the politics – he should have said ideology – of a state determined its defensive or offensive disposition (Lossau 1815: 7). With this he founded the Prussian tradition of those who opposed the interference of political decision-makers in the conduct of war, and in the words of Colonel (later Field Marshal) von Manteuffel to Prussian Prince Frederic Charles in 1857, warning him to keep his nose out of what was the military’s business: ‘when the sword has been drawn, war ... steps into the foreground, becomes fully independent, and politics becomes its servant’ (quoted by Hahlweg in Clausewitz 1832/1976: 67). Moltke would famously go even further in his resistance to Bismarck in the context of the Wars of German Unification (Carr 1991).

The political role of Strategy, even as applied within war, gradually won out against this attempt to cut politicians out of the conduct of war. This did not wipe out the tensions between political leaders and the executing military which this division of labour necessarily entailed. The technical approach which we sketched in the previous section still reverberates in the 1989 definitions of ‘strategy’ by the US military, but it simultaneously acknowledges the political aims of warfare (Handel 1996: 36). But by the late twentieth century, John Garnett’s definition of ‘strategy’ as ‘the way in which military power’ is or might be ‘used by governments in pursuit of their interests’ would have found universal recognition (Garnett 1975: 3). The late Michael Handel (1942–2001), venerated teacher of generations of US officers, put it more simply and trenchantly: ‘strategy is the development and use of all resources in peace and war in support of national policies to secure victory’ (Handel 1996: 36). We see in both American definitions a much wider understanding of Strategy, which takes on board the nexus between policy and war as its instrument.

Dialectics of will

All the definitions of ‘strategy’ we have encountered so far fall short of taking into account that war has two sides: how can a definition of Strategy take into consideration the interaction of one’s own side with the enemy? Clausewitz had been a trailblazer here – his comparison

of war with wrestling incited later strategic thinkers to build this dimension into the relationship between power and the use of force, so as to take account of the *dialectics* of the use of force. The supreme commander of the Prussian forces in the wars of German Unification, Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (1800–91), was one of them. Like others before him, he described ‘strategy’ as positioned on a level between the higher sphere of politics and the lower plane of military operations.

Politics uses war to reach its purposes, it influences decisively the beginning and the end [of war], and retains the right to increase its demands during its course or to settle for lesser aims. Given this uncertainty, strategy can only try to obtain the highest possible aims which could conceivably lie within its reach in view of the available means. It is thus that [strategy] best serves politics, by working for the purpose of politics, but quite independently from [politics] in its actions.

He went on to explain that the next task of Strategy, after that of serving politics, is to prepare the means of waging war. This task had to be fulfilled as a function of given resources, geography, logistics and so forth.

Matters are different concerning the subsequent task of strategy: the military use of available resources, that is, in operations. This is where our will soon encounters the independent will of our adversary. Although we can impose limits on it, we can only break it by the means of tactics, [i.e.] through battle. (Moltke 1960: 316)

More importantly, however, Moltke produced the famous dictum that a battle plan does not survive the actual encounter with the enemy:

It is a ... delusion if to believe that one can determine a campaign plan far in advance and carry it out until the end. The first clash with the enemy’s main forces creates a new situation, depending on its outcome. Much of what one had intended to do becomes impossible to carry out, some things become possible which could not have been expected earlier. The only thing the army command can do is correctly appreciate the changed circumstances, and then to give instructions to do what is appropriate for the foreseeable next phase. (q.i. Rohrschneider 1999: 157)

After the First World War, Johannes Kromayer developed this strategy further. In the middle of the great German ‘Strategy debate’ surrounding Delbrück (see [chapters 4 and 7](#)), he – rightly – argued that Clausewitz’s idea that policy determines a firm set of war aims at the outset of war was deficient, as one’s war aims, and policy itself, and with it Strategy, must surely change throughout any war as a function of the success or failure of one’s operations (Kromayer [1925a](#): 401f.). In the middle of the Cold War, André Beaufre developed this idea further. In Clausewitzian terms he saw ‘strategy’ as ‘the art of the dialectic of force, or more precisely, the dialectic of opposing wills, which use force for the settlement of their disputes’ (Beaufre [1963/1965](#): 22). The American military historians Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley came to similar conclusions: ‘strategy is a process, a constant adaptation to shifting conditions and circumstances in a world where chance, uncertainty, and ambiguity dominate’ (Murray and Grimsley [1994](#): 1; Murray [1999a](#): 33). This in turn was echoed by their British colleague Hew Strachan, who argues that ‘strategy in war is a process’ that requires continuous adjustment in the light of enemy action and a continuous reconsideration of policy and new policy-making, involving political leaders, military leaders and other experts (Strachan [2006](#): 59–82).

The realisation that any given Strategy must not be static (if it is to be successful), but must react to and be re-formed according to the interaction with an enemy, is another huge step forward in our understanding. It has not, however, penetrated Strategy-making sufficiently in practice, nor has the concession that should logically flow from it, namely, that the achievement of a stable peace will require concessions and a commitment to it from both sides (Heuser [2007a](#)). Instead, the century and a half from the French Revolutionary Wars to the Second World War was dominated by the quest for the enemy’s unconditional surrender, and thus de facto a replacement of the enemy regime. This would prove fatal if the ‘hearts and minds’ of the populations of the adversarial country(ies) could not be won by persuasion to embrace the post-war settlement.

Another crucial realisation is that Strategy is a function of variables – such as one’s own political aims and the enemy’s political aims – but of partly interconnected variables, which makes the whole equation even more complicated.

War as a function of multiple interdependent variables

The first step on this intellectual exploration of Strategy was Jomini's categorisation of wars, which implicitly shows that one's own war aims vary, and are thus variables. But further variables could be identified.

It was a discovery of Clausewitz's, in my view his most original and insightful one, that war is a function of variables some of which in turn are *interconnected*, that is they are functions of each other. Particularly famous is Clausewitz's 'remarkable trinity' of variables:

- 'Primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force', and these he correlated to the passions of the people as a whole: the more the people were involved in a war, the more they identified with it, the more violent the war would be.
- 'The play of chance and probability', together with 'the interplay of courage and talent' that depended on the peculiarities of the military commander and the army, the commander's *coup d'oeil*, the morale of the troops and so on.
- Policy, using war as its instrument, subjecting war 'to reason alone'. This he identified with the intentions of the government (in other words, its political war aims).

Clausewitz surmised that any war is a function of all three sets of variables and, crucially, recognised that they affect each other: for example, an upwards trend of violence, hatred and enmity might force governments to extend formerly modest war aims. Or a population's lack of emotional engagement in a war might undermine the morale of the armed forces committed. The Clausewitzian notion of war as a function of *interdependent* variables was taken up by Marshal Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929) and others who studied him assiduously in the late nineteenth century in order to find out why the Prussians had defeated France so thoroughly in 1870/1 (Derrécaigaix 1885; Foch 1900).

Clausewitz had identified further variables, strewn here and there in his text: in a particularly poignant chapter in Book VIII, he noted that every age has its own way of warfare, thus identifying what today we would call 'culture' as one crucial variable. Material variables, especially the terrain of the battlefield, the ability or inability to communicate fast and gather intelligence during battle (the 'fog of war'), and a number of other technical and circumstantial factors were also emphasised by him.

Clausewitz was not the first to have identified the cultural variable. Classical writers had commented on the very different ‘ways of war’ of individual culturally very different groups (Scythians, Persians, Huns, Saracens, Turks, etc). In modern times, the central theme in Guibert’s *Essai général de tactique* was the nexus that he saw between a society’s values (and thus, culture) and internal political system and its way of war (Guibert 1772/1781). Henry Humphrey Evans Lloyd (1718–83), a Welsh mercenary who in his life fought for Louis XV of France, for Empress Maria Theresia of Austria and Empress Elizabeth of Russia, identified political culture as a variable in the waging of war: drawing on the usual examples from classical antiquity but also from his own experiences, he differentiated between the ways despotic, monarchical and republican governments used force in interstate affairs. To him, a democracy (republic) was clearly predestined to have a defensive overall Strategy, and was ill equipped to wage long wars or wars far from home; Lloyd also assumed that democracies would have neither a standing army nor mercenaries, but that its population would rise up as militia to defend its own state (Lloyd 1781/2005: 458–78).

Guibert and Clausewitz noted, and the Clausewitz pupil (and critic) Martin van Creveld brought to our attention again in the late twentieth century, that different cultures perceive war differently. As we have seen, Rühle noted that not all pursue peace. There are cultures (and sub-cultures, thinking of sections of the military even of fairly peaceful civilisations) where the warrior is admired, and there are age-groups (particularly adolescents and young men) in which the excitement of the adventure of ‘war’ outweighs other cultural counter-balances. As van Creveld put it, there are people who like to make war, and political factors may simply be an excuse for doing so (Creveld 1991, ch. 6). One is well advised to take these factors into account before espousing any theory which sees any violent conflict as guided by realistic political aims from its beginning to its end. Clausewitz underlined the many forms a war can take by likening it to a chameleon: he described war as infinitely variable, depending on a multitude of contextual factors, the many variables alluded to above. In some conflicts between large groups of people (such as tribes, warring factions) or states (with or without the use of force), political aims can be fairly well established. They may show a conscious use of force or the threat of its use in support of these political aims, to change the will of the adversary and to settle the dispute to one’s own advantage.

In other wars such aims are less easily discernible, if at all, which can be for a host of reasons: the lack of a strong, co-ordinated leadership and the resulting multitude of unconcerted, divergent interests, but also the previously invoked cultural factors.

This particular wheel has been reinvented by anthropologists towards the end of the twentieth century, albeit in a more systematic way, and with an emphasis on different variables. Employing case studies from different cultures, they have identified three sets of variables that dominate war, apart from situational constraints that are special for each case:

1. material variables, such as the natural environment (geographic features, climate ...), technology, the economy;
2. social institutions (anything from clan loyalty or kingship to statehood), including patterns of behaviour that are largely taken for granted and seen as norm;²
3. culture (mainly collectively shared belief clusters, images, symbols and myths), defined sometimes to include norms and patterns of behaviour (Snyder 2002: 14f.).

While some, like the anthropologist Raymond Kelly, have looked at these variables as independent from one another, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, pioneer in this area, but also the philosopher Emile Durkheim, the historian Ernest Gellner and the anthropologist Brian Ferguson postulated a hierarchy of factors ('a nested hierarchy') in which material factors were the most important, influencing institutions, which in turn influenced or even determined culture. Others, like the anthropologist Simon Harrison, reversed the order of nesting, insisting that it is culture that determines patterns of social behaviour and institutions, and even determines how people deal with their environment. In the light of the historical evidence of the evolution of warfare, especially in the Western world, one cannot but agree with the anthropologist Jack Snyder, who postulates reciprocal influences and causality among all three sets of variables. Snyder underlined the effects of their interaction and 'complex feedback relationships' in distinct circumstances (Snyder 2002: 12, 32f.). To sum up, then, anthropologists like some of the early strategists

² According to certain definitions I prefer, social institutions, and especially norms and patterns of behaviour, are subsumed under 'culture'.

before them analyse war as a function of material factors, social institutions and culture.

‘Social institutions’ and ‘culture’ overlap, according to many definitions. For this reason and for the purposes of this book, it is more useful to redefine these second and third levels of variables. Subsuming both categories into a single category of ‘culture’, we shall examine the conduct of war as a function of passive and active aspects of culture. Passive aspects are mindsets or beliefs about the world: for example with hostile groups confronting us, with lessons of past wars to guide us, with rules and conventions of behaviour which would be dangerous or immoral (or both) to ignore or challenge. As John Hattendorf put it, ‘strategists think in the context of the prevailing cultural and national attitudes that surround them’ (Hattendorf 2000: 1, 21, 127).

Here we should include existing social structures and institutions, and also beliefs and myths about oneself, one’s own group, and one’s enemies, beliefs about the working of the world, beliefs about moral obligations, existing customs or traditions that have to be upheld. Active aspects of culture are those where freedom of choice is more pronounced: these include the prioritisation of certain values and principles over others, the definition of political aims, the changes that may be brought about through the agency of war (or the threat of the use of armed force), the institutions, norms of behaviour yet to be created and prescribed as desirable. Active aspects of culture tend to be subordinate to its passive aspects: few people can escape, even in their imagination, the world in which they live and which many assume to be immutable. Yet the ‘complex feedback relationship’ which Jack Snyder postulates exists here too, as all innovation, once realised, in turn affects culture as it is passively perceived.

To return to Jomini, he named further variables, which included the degree of the passions aroused by either side in a war (which correctly implies that what for one side is a ‘war of opinion’ – fought out over ideological differences worth dying for – might merely be a war for a limited political aim for the other side, mobilising much less public support). Additional variables for Jomini were the military systems of both sides, that is how and whom they recruited as soldiers, with what reserves, financial resources and weapons, and the degree of their loyalty to their military and political commanders.

The ‘character’ of the head of state or government, the talents of the military leaders, the relationship of political decision-makers and military leadership and of course enduring physical factors such as geography and a state’s wealth in human beings, in natural resources, industry and social structure, all were identified by Jomini as variables that would influence the conduct and outcome of a war (Jomini 1837/1868: 38–65). In the following chapters, this very useful list of variables will be applied to war in different ages.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Mahan produced another list of variables which he thought influenced Strategy. He listed geography, with its sub-aspects of sea lanes, harbours and territory (*Hinterland*), the size of the population, the character of the people and the character of the government, the political system and within it the ideology and political orientation of the political party/parties in government (Mahan 1890: 25, 57). The ‘character of the people’ was a *topos* going back to antiquity, of course, had often been invoked throughout history, but acquired a new appeal in the era of Social Darwinism. Writing a little later than Mahan, Sir Herbert Richmond (1871–1946), a Royal Navy admiral turned Cambridge don, wrote a study of Britain’s war of 1739–48 by identifying the following factors that came into play: geography, and the requirements that different parts of the British Empire had, the ships available to the belligerents, the manpower, greater political and diplomatic aims, parliamentary politics and pressures and the wrangling among the main decision-makers and players on either side of the war within the opposing governments (Schurman 1965: 140f.).

Almost a century later, another naval specialist, the Briton Geoffrey Till, established a new list of (arguably interconnected) variables influencing Strategy, very much in the tradition of Mahan:

- a. a maritime community;
- b. resources (and the economic basis for a big navy);
- c. styles of government;
- d. geography and geopolitics;
- e. shipping;
- f. naval bases;
- g. the fighting instrument (Till 1982: 75–90).

The Belgian teacher of Strategy Henri Bernard argued that military history had as its proper subject of study the evolution of the art of

war over the centuries, as a function of the multiple variables he discussed, applying a Clausewitzian template, in his three volumes called *Total War and Revolutionary War* (essentially a course on military history up to 1945). His variables included demographic, social, political, economic, ideological, technological and institutional factors such as command structures within the armed forces (Bernard 1965: 5).

Again we see that this list is interconnected – no strong economy without the demographic basis to keep it going, no free society without a related economic structure, no totalitarian ideology without attempts to centralise control over all economic activities within the state. Large, standing armies evolved with the creation of centralised states with the infrastructure required to raise the taxes to maintain such an army. Nationalism arose first out of the rhetoric of the ‘nation’ which began to be used during the French Revolution, underpinned by the use of the *levée en masse*, which linked citizenship with the obligation to defend the nation. Subsequently, the growth of national printing presses and literacy helped further the growth of nationalism.

A refreshingly original categorisation was produced by T.E. Lawrence (1888–1935) on the basis of his reading of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts. Lawrence defined three ‘elements, one algebraical, one biological, and one psychological’. The first he liked to call *hecastics*, and it was

pure science, subject to the laws of mathematics, without humanity. It dealt with known invariables, fixed conditions, space and time, inorganic things like hills and climates and railways, with mankind in type-masses too great for individual variety ... It was essentially formulable ... The second factor was biological, the breaking-point, life and death, or better, wear and tear. Bionomics seemed a good name for it. The war-philosophers had properly made it an art, and had elevated one item in it, ‘effusion of blood’, to the height of a principle. It became humanity in battle, an art touching every side of our corporal being, and very war. There was a line of variability (man) running through all its estimates. Its components were sensitive and illogical.

The third factor Lawrence described as psychological, ‘of which propaganda is a stained and ignoble part’, but linked it to what Xenophon called ‘diathetic’, from a Greek word for ‘order’.

Some of it concerns the crowd, and adjustment of spirit to the point where it becomes fit to exploit in action, the prearrangement of a changing opinion to a certain end ... It considers the capacity of mood of our men, their complexities and mutability, and the cultivation of what in them profits the intention. We had to arrange their minds in order for battle ... and through [our own men] ... the minds of the enemy ... and thirdly, the mind of the nation supporting us behind the firing line, and the mind of the hostile nation [a]waiting the verdict, and the neutrals looking on. (Lawrence 1920, 266f.)

We see echoes here of Clausewitz's trinity and a very trenchant and helpful perception of what in the evolution of warfare is variable, what are immutable constants.

New technical developments spawn ideologically driven fantasies and speculations about how to use armies, and about political consequences. Historical experiences of wars, especially traumatic ones, determine the subsequent preoccupations of survivors. Decisions made about war are a function of the structures of the societies that wage the wars, and decision-makers' ideas and views are conditioned by the mindset particular to their culture. War aims are dictated by the concepts of the world, of society, of friend and foe, and of notions of what one can achieve through military manpower and technology. And Strategy is a function of all these variables and many more. This analytical approach will be used to formulate a series of guiding questions to examine the evolution of Strategy in the following chapters.

Strategy in peace and war

But does force always have to be used in order to settle disputes? Can one not change the enemy's will by the threat of the use of force alone? Is Strategy not something that is part of peace as well as war? These questions were particularly acute when in the twentieth century authors realised that the absence of war did not amount to the absence of interstate strife, with the threat of another world war overshadowing peace.

As we have seen, some writers of the nineteenth century included the *preparation* for war in peacetime among the tasks of Strategy. In the age of total war, the realisation dawned on several writers on the subject that this was not the only role of Strategy outside periods of declared war. The political extremes of communism and fascism

met not least in their common perception of peace as the continuation of war by other means. Western liberal thinkers, by contrast, developed a different perception. They began to see the use of force as only one instrument of state policy, alongside many others, like diplomacy, trade policies and so on. In turn, the latent threat of the use of force could be an instrument of state policy in times of peace. Western liberal thinkers like Norman Angell (1872–1967) did not doubt that conflicts of interest occurred in times of peace, but they tended to think more of these conflicts as resolvable without actual fighting. Even among them, few would doubt that politics, including of course the relations between states, would always include conflict and strife and a struggle of wills. But if military force could be a latent instrument of policy, Strategy needed to be redefined. In the interwar period, Admiral Castex noted:

[S]trategy is ... the general conduct of operations ... Strategy prepares combat, makes the effort to carry it out in the best conditions, and to produce the best results ... [Strategy] contains [*détient*] the general idea to which the campaign is dedicated ... It guides tactics, leaving it room for action when its hour has arrived. Strategy is on each side of combat, tactics during combat. (Castex 1937: 9)

But Castex also adopted the contemporary idea that Strategy was operational in times of war and also in times of peace, and the view that naval conferences and diplomacy were just as much tools of Strategy as the use of force in war (Castex 1937: 17f.).

In 1943, while the Second World War was being waged and the public did not know the secrets of the Manhattan Project, the American scholar Edward Mead Earle edited his famous volume *The Makers of Modern Strategy*. Here he wrote, much as Moltke the Elder had done: ‘Strategy deals with war, preparation for war, and the waging of war. Narrowly defined, it is the art of military command, of projecting and directing a campaign.’

He noted that the word was used more narrowly for the ‘art of military command’ which the general had mastered in order to ‘win victory’ in battle until the end of the eighteenth century.

But as war and society have become more complicated – and war ... is an inherent part of society – strategy has of necessity required increasing consideration of nonmilitary factors, economic, psychological, moral,

political, and technological. Strategy, therefore, is not merely a concept of wartime, but is an inherent element of statecraft at all times ... In the present-day world, then, strategy is the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation – or a coalition of nations – including its armed forces, to the end that its vital interests shall be effectively promoted and secured against enemies, actual, potential, or merely presumed. The highest type of strategy – sometimes called grand strategy – is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory.

And it is in this broader sense that Earle used the term in his path-breaking volume (Earle 1943: viii).

After the Second World War, well into the Cold War, the study not only of international relations (really, interstate relations) but also of Strategy took off, with many new definitions being added, some coming from new disciplines. Thomas Schelling (1921–) came to strategic studies from economics and, specifically, games theory, introducing his own term, the ‘strategy of conflict’, in which various contestants (who might be state regimes) might try to reach outcomes to their conflicts that were mutually advantageous. In the nuclear age, neither side could find much comfort in the notion that Strategy was all about imposing one’s will upon an enemy who could make the price for such a success exorbitant. With ‘strategy of conflict’, Schelling emphasised the ‘interdependence of the adversaries’ decisions’, in conflicts which were equalled to ‘variable-sum games’, in which ‘the sum of the gains of the participants involved is not fixed’. While victory seen as the imposition of one protagonist’s will upon the other is a fixed-sum game in which one’s gain is the other’s loss, Schelling introduced the idea that – especially in the nuclear age – this is only one of many possible outcomes. Crucially, the avoidance of nuclear war might be a mutually advantageous outcome that would persuade warring parties to settle for less than an all-out imposition of their will upon the enemy (Schelling 1960: 3–5).

Robert Osgood, another leading American expert on security issues, drew similar consequences for the meaning of Strategy:

[M]ilitary strategy must now be understood as nothing less than the overall plan for utilizing the capacity for armed coercion – in conjunction with the economic, diplomatic, and psychological instruments of power – to

support foreign policy most effectively by overt, covert, and tacit means. (Osgood 1962: 5)

The definition proposed by John Hattendorf implies a similar approach:

Strategy reaches for an overarching idea, reflecting an understanding of an entire war. While strategy involves this conceptual dimension, it is, at the same time, the comprehensive and actual direction of national power, including armed force, to achieve some measure of control over an opponent, and, by that control, to achieve specific practical and political ends. (Hattendorf 2000: 122)

Sir Lawrence Freedman, with his political science background, put it perhaps most elegantly: ‘Strategy is about the relationship between (political) ends and (military, economic, political etc.) means. It is the art of creating power’ (Freedman 2008: 32).

Oxford historian Hew Strachan rightly concluded that the term ‘strategy’ has thus undergone a considerable shift in meaning and usage since Clausewitz was writing. Until the First World War, ‘strategy’ was used by most writers to mean something below politics in a hierarchy of determinants. Since then, terms like ‘grand strategy’ or ‘major strategy’ (as opposed to ‘pure strategy’ or ‘minor strategy’) have been coined, embracing the pursuit of political ends (primarily in international relations) not only with military tools, but also with diplomatic, economic or even cultural instruments. The Cold War with its blurred distinction between war and peace finally pushed ‘strategy’ over the fence up to the level of politics, leading to a ‘conflation of strategy and politics’ (Strachan 2003). One attempt to bring clarity to this area is the introduction particularly in Britain of the term ‘grand strategy’, referring to the way political aims are translated into the use of different available tools of state politics (Cabinet Office, Historical Section 1956–76). But the expansion of the word ‘strategy’ in contemporary usage continues.

All in all, the word ‘Strategy’ is hard to press into one universally accepted definition valid through the ages. Nevertheless, important insights that have been gained by successive strategists building on previous generations include the following. Strategy is a comprehensive way to try to pursue political ends, including the threat or actual

use of force, in a dialectic of wills – there have to be at least two sides to a conflict. These sides interact, and thus a Strategy will rarely be successful if it shows no adaptability. Before the French Revolution, it was not spelled out but tacitly assumed that the antagonists – mainly princes – had common aims and that Strategy was not a ‘zero-sum game’, as no side wanted the total destruction of the social order of the other; in most contexts, both sides assumed each other’s survival. From the time of the French Revolution until 1945, by contrast, the assumption that Strategy was a ‘zero-sum game’ prevailed (although these words were introduced by Schelling only in the subsequent period). To win, one side had to impose its will upon the enemy; or at least this is what the vast majority of strategists assumed. The nuclear age made strategists aware again that conflicting sides might have common interests – especially, the avoidance of nuclear apocalypse. Strategy once again was opened up to the highly political dimensions of bargaining and the quest for ‘win-win’ solutions that might satisfy – at least to some extent – both sides and avoid worst outcomes (especially major or nuclear war).

In today’s popular usage, the term ‘strategy’ is applied to many realms of life outside politics proper. Its merger with the jargon of economics and management is particularly prominent (Strachan 2003). Today, the advertisement of a vacant ‘chair in strategy’ is as likely to refer to a branch of business management as to anything military. Meanwhile, governments try to develop ‘strategies’ for dealing with unemployment, housing shortages, education and so on, and every business has a business plan or ‘strategy’. In business-speak, ‘strategy’ is defined as ‘the direction and scope of an organisation over the long term, which achieves advantages in a changing environment through its configuration of resources and competences with the aim of fulfilling stakeholder expectations’ (Johnson *et al.* 2005: 9). The conflation of ‘strategy’ and ‘politics’ or even ‘long-term economic aims and planning’ and the vaguely synonymous use of the term ‘strategy’ with that of ‘policy’ (and thus the inflation of the term ‘strategy’) can be deplored or criticised as unhelpful, or taken as a matter of fact and worked around (Strachan 2003). In this book, however, I shall try not to use the terms as synonyms, but to keep them apart as far as possible. I shall be using the terminology of my sources where at all reasonable, unless this leads to excessive confusion, and given the nature and concerns of these sources, problems will not arise too often.