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‘Redpointing’ Strategy: A Model for Strategy-making in Contemporary Conflict, argues that traditional models of strategy-making may be inappropriate in wars of discretion where national survival is not at stake. Exercising discretion may not be viable because other priorities such as a commitment to an alliance or strategic relationship with another nation might take precedence and drive the commitment. At the same time, the character of the conflict, particularly in ‘wars among the people’ is often unclear and policy choices are therefore being refined as we fight. In these circumstances traditional models of strategy-making are less than ideal. The paper argues that strategy as developed by Clausewitz, Von Moltke and Jomini was largely stolen by operational art in the aftermath of US experience in Vietnam. More current twentieth century definitions then became conflated with policy during the Cold War. Whilst traditional strategy as described by the likes of Colin S. Gray and Hew Strachan remains the touchstone for existential threats and wars of national survival, a new model might be required for lesser threats in a more complex world. ‘Redpointing’ builds strategy in a coherent but incremental way and looks to recover some of the ground lost from traditional strategy by stitching a seam between operational art and policy.
INTRODUCTION

Curbar, in the English Peak District; just one of numerous millstone grit edges that mark the transition from valley to plateau in this patchwork of nature at the southern end of the Pennines. Beneath grey winter skies and in a chilling breeze, a young climber from Sheffield – Oli Grounsell - contemplates the challenge ahead; an extremely demanding, almost un-protectable route that climbs a blank wall and arête on the edge known as ‘The Zone’. Its objective grading of ‘Extreme grade 9’ (E9) marks it out as one of the UK’s most serious and sustained routes. In its 50 feet of height it has only one point of protection, a skyhook – a hooked piece of metal that rests on a small rock ledge only millimetres deep and is required to be held under tension by another climber to prevent it loosing its tenuous purchase. If the climber falls, as he surely will given the severity of the challenge, and the skyhook should come free, the climber will hit the rocks 40 feet below; a likely fatal and mind concentrating prospect.

But the climber has been here before. Although the objective, to climb the cliff by this particular route is clear, so demanding is its character that it is near impossible to do without rehearsal and practice. In stages, the climber has mastered different moves and sections of the climb. He has brought along friends and specialist equipment to help protect him. Now he needs to link it all together in a single attempt. Make no mistake, this is not strategy it is tactics. But the combination of: the climb itself, the ends; equipment, training, friends and rehearsals, the means; and the skill, technique, tenacity and mental attitude of the climber, the ways; are a signpost for how strategy in the twenty-first century might be developed. Not in a blinding flash of understanding and inspiration that aligns ends, ways and means that can then be applied without adjustment save in the face of action by the enemy. But, rather developed incrementally, stage by stage, in acknowledgement of the vertical dynamics that have always been driven by the enemy, but also by a horizontal dynamic powered by imperfect knowledge and understanding, alliances and a multitude of other actors that did not impact war and strategy in the nineteenth

century as Clausewitz, Jomini and Von Moltke refined their thinking. Climbers call the approach ‘redpointing’.

The paper begins by describing the key tenets of strategic thinking over the last two centuries. It argues how classical definitions of strategy with their origins in the arrangement and movement of forces on the battlefield and a clear association with generalship rather than politics have now been usurped by a wider definition that involves all the instruments of national power. Then, as the military sought to introduce thinking on operational art, it describes how this eroded the space traditionally held by classical strategy and led to a conflation of policy and strategy.

In the second section of the paper it examines what has changed in the character of war and strategy. It then examines the issues that make strategy-making so challenging in the contemporary world; globalisation and interdependency, wicked problems, imperfect knowledge and a lack of understanding, and finally the current political-military environment.

Last, and most important, in its third section it argues that the solution to this problem lies in a better comprehension of the relationship between tactics, operational art, strategy and policy. At its heart it argues that strategy today may need to be built incrementally; ‘redpointing’. The fourth and final section is a conclusion that provides a synthesis of the key arguments.

PART 1 - CLASSICAL STRATEGIC THOUGHT

It is clear that any consideration of strategic thought confined to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a narrow one, ignoring as it must among others Sun-Tzu\(^2\) and Pericles\(^3\). As Colin Gray has observed “[t]o be educated in strategy via such instructive and bloody episodes as Athens’ Sicilian Expedition of 415-413 BC…avoids the danger of military institutional or national parochialism and bias that

is apt to intrude upon the contemplation of contemporary issues…”⁴. Equally, no analysis would be complete without an acknowledgement of “Thucydides oft-quoted triptych of why nations go to war, for ‘fear, honour and interest’…”⁵, but time and scope preclude further discussion here.

Clausewitz’s analysis in On War⁶ is problematic because it is limited by his own experience and recent history to a largely post-Westphalian era between 1740 and the 1820s. It draws heavily on the experiences of Frederick the Great (1740-86) and, of course, Napoleon who Clausewitz viewed as the ‘god of war’ fighting an ‘ideal’ war where the whole population is mobilized to the war effort under a political leader with unlimited war aims. However, even over this short period Clausewitz refined his thinking which had initially been shaped by Napoleon’s rout of the Prussians at Austerlitz in 1805 and Jena in 1806, largely because the Prussian Army “remained mired in the ways of Frederick the Great”⁷. When Napoleon’s strategy of ‘unrestrained violence’ failed in Moscow in 1812 and later at Waterloo, Clausewitz was forced to reconsider the relationship between Politik and war. This resulted in a re-write of Chapter I, Book I, which “alone I regard as finished” he declares in his unfinished note of 1830⁸. The remainder of the manuscript he regards as little other than a “collection of materials from which a theory of war was to have been distilled”.⁹

Moreover, when he died from cholera in 1831 it was left to his wife, Marie and her brother Friedrich Wilhelm von Brühl to refine the work for publication and we cannot be certain of the extent of von Brühl’s edit. It is also a difficult read and challenging to translate. Even today there remains debate over the precise

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⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans., (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1976), Book One, Ch. 3.
⁸ Carl von Clausewitz ‘Unfinished Note, presumably written in 1830’, On War, p. 79.
⁹ Idem.
interpretation of some words. For example, Antulio Echevarria\textsuperscript{10} translates \textit{wunderliche} as “wondrous”, which Colin Gray prefers as “… ‘wondrous’ trinity,” consisting of passion and violence; chance, opportunity, and uncertainty; and reason in policy\textsuperscript{11} – the components of war’s ‘nature’. In contrast Howard and Paret’s more often cited 1976 translation\textsuperscript{12} uses “remarkable” in their original work and “paradoxical” in their second edition.

In \textit{On War} Clausewitz was attempting to establish a universal theory of war. Michael Handel argues that its greatest value is to “achieve understanding through debate, through point and counterpoint”, his “work is a combination of theory and reality”\textsuperscript{13}. Hew Strachan believes \textit{On War} is primarily about “war, strategy and tactics rather than war and policy”\textsuperscript{14}, and that too literal interpretations are made of Clausewitz’s writing, especially the “maxim that ‘war is an instrument of policy’”, or that scholars incorrectly attempt to apply “modern understanding of a word on a Clausewitzian concept.”\textsuperscript{15}

Clausewitz defined strategy as “the use of engagements for the object of war”\textsuperscript{16}, with engagements being described as a single entity, a battle for example. He distinguishes between the planning and executing of these ‘engagements’ as tactics, and the coordinating of each of the engagements with others as strategy, the sum of which constitute the ‘theory’ or ‘art of war’. He sees battles as a means to an end, not decisive on their own but decisive because of how they present opportunities for exploitation.

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\textsuperscript{12} \textit{On War}, Book One, Ch. 3.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{On War}, II, 1 is the main discussion of these points; see also III, 1, p. 177, and 10, p. 202: \textit{Ibid}. p. 22.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{On War}, II, I, p 146.
\end{flushleft}
Clausewitz’s notion of a Centre of Gravity (CoG) against which force should be applied (Schwerpunkt) is also problematic. This is because the notion is muddled between military and political interpretations; whether it is a physical thing such as an army or leader, or a conceptual thing such as popular support of the population. Today, as Colin Gray observes, “…only contemporary assessment of context can determine the identity of the most relevant CoG. And only contextual analysis is able to reveal whether it is advisable, or even feasible, to menace the enemy’s CoG.”

There are difficulties too with even Clausewitz’s greatest insights. His apparent subjugation of war to politics, “[t]he political object – the original motive for the war – will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires”, as Gray observes, “is logically compelling, but fearsomely difficult to apply in practice.” Strachan goes further, arguing that under Napoleon where war achieves “its state of absolute perfection”, Clausewitz is blasphemy to emphasise that the role of policy is not to direct war, “but to serve it, to enable its true nature. The trinity of passion, probability, and policy, or (if you must) the people, army and government, were united – in war.”

Napoleon himself was more concerned with ‘grand tactics’ than ‘strategy’ and it is only because of the writings of Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri de Jomini that strategy became a concept and term more widely used. Jomini took a more scientific approach to strategy than Clausewitz and describes strategy as “the art of making war upon the map, and comprehends the whole theatre of operations.” In anticipation of argument to follow, it presages the current UK doctrinal definition of a ‘campaign’: “a set of military operations planned and conducted to achieve strategic objectives within a Theatre of Operations”.

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18 CG Colin S. Gray: Schools for Strategy: op cit. p. 44.
19 Ibid. p. 40.
20 On War, II, p166; VIII, 2, p. 580
21 Hew Strachan, ‘Clausewitz and the Dialectics of War’: op cit. p. 44.
Jomini added that “Strategy…is the art of bringing the greatest part of the forces of an army upon the important point of the theatre of war or zone of operations”.\textsuperscript{24} This is in keeping with Heinrich von Bülow, who wrote “Strategy is the science of military movements outside the enemy’s range of view, tactics within it”.\textsuperscript{25}

Jomini’s view on strategy defined the military approach until the turn of the century. “By 1900 military men were, broadly speaking, agreed that strategy described the conduct of operations in a particular theatre of war. It involved encirclement, envelopment and manoeuvre. It was something done by generals.”\textsuperscript{26} This was ‘traditional’ strategy, which did not embrace the entire phenomena of war, but rather was sandwiched “between national policy on the one hand and tactics on the other”.\textsuperscript{27}

The challenge of strategy at this point became more about its boundaries with policy. Helmuth Von Moltke, the Chief of the Prussian general staff in the wars of German unification (1864-71) shared Clausewitz’s perspective on the need to break the will of the opponent, but more broadly made his own assessment of war and strategy as a political scientist. Moltke said “the politician might take the lead in deciding to go to war and would resume the lead when negotiating the peace, but that he should fall silent while the war was being waged. In other words, strategy, not policy should lead even if the strategy followed in wartime might have political implications”.\textsuperscript{28} In 1911 the French General Jean Colin added “once war is decided on, it is absolutely necessary that a general should be left free to conduct it at his own discretion.”\textsuperscript{29} In 1912, another French general, Henri Mordacq stressed the need for a general to submit his plans for governmental approval to ensure they conformed with the political objective. He quoted Moltke: “strategy works uniquely in the

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\item Heinrich von Bülow, \textit{Geist des neuren Kriegssystems hergeleitet aus dem Grundsatze einer Basis der Operationen} (Hamburg, 1799), 83f; from Beatrice Heuser: \textit{Idem.}
\item \textit{Idem.}
\item Hew Strachan, ‘Clausewitz and the Dialectics of War’: \textit{op cit}. p. 25.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
direction indicated by policy, but at the same time it protects its complete independence to choose its means of action.”

“The First World War dealt Clausewitz a near mortal blow in western military thought”. Basil Liddell Hart argued that the War was an attempt of ‘absolute war’ that had disastrous results, whilst more recent critics such as John Keegan and David Stevenson have argued that “this was a war without political utility.” The result was that Clausewitz was relegated from the annals of strategic thinking until 1976 when, in the aftermath of Vietnam, the US military’s search for alternate thinking would marry up with Howard and Paret’s timely translation of Clausewitz’s *On War*.

Just before WWI, the British maritime strategist Julian Corbett sought a distinction between what he called ‘major’ and ‘minor’ strategy. Minor strategy he argued were the plans for military operations and the selection of military objectives. Major strategy, in contrast, “deal[t] with the whole resources of a nation for war…the Army and Navy as parts of one force…the politico-diplomatic position of the country…and its commercial and financial position…” As Hew Strachan points out, “Corbett had therefore begun to apply the word ‘strategy’ to policy and to see the two as integrated in a way that Clausewitz had not”, a view largely shared by the American strategist Alfred Thayer Mehan.

After the stalemate of attrition in WWI, scholars and analysts were forced to rethink strategy. Building on the ‘total’ war experience and the developing links between economic capability and military application, JFC Fuller, in his 1923 book *The Reformation of War*, introduced three different types of strategy: ‘grand’, ‘major’

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and ‘minor’. Grand strategy saw the uniting of military, civil, commercial and industrial efforts under the government; “coordinating the material and social forces of the British Empire to be well prepared for any future conflict.”\(^{36}\) Major strategy meanwhile, concerned the conduct of the military campaign whilst minor strategy was broadly tactics. These ideas were developed by Basil Liddel Hart and published in his 1929 work *Decisive Wars of History*. In it he describes the role of grand strategy as: “to coordinate and direct all resources of a nation towards the attainment of the political object of the war: the goal defined by national policy…fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy.”\(^{37}\) He observed further that “grand strategy must look beyond war to the subsequent peace” in order to avoid damaging future security and prosperity.\(^{38}\) Generals meanwhile, would practice what he called ‘pure strategy’. Liddell Hart’s ideas shaped thinking in the Second World War as American, British and Soviet leaders sought to coordinate their plans; they “practised grand strategy refusing to treat the theatres of war in isolation and settling the relationship of one theatre to another.”\(^{39}\)

Drawing on the experience of this conflict, Michael Howard produced his own definition of grand strategy as “the mobilisation and deployment of national resources of wealth, manpower and industrial capacity, together with the enlistment of those of allied and, where feasible, of neutral powers, for the purpose of achieving the goals of national policy in wartime.”\(^{40}\) Thus began a “conflation of strategy with policy”\(^{41}\) in a context of ‘total war’, a conflation that has bedevilled strategic theory since 1945.

Following the atomic bombings in Japan that brought an end to WWII, an American strategist Bernard Brodie wrote that such weapons could only make sense as weapons of deterrence. This was not so much about using military force as it was...

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about having military force and the threat it provided. One of the key proponents of deterrence thinking, Thomas Schelling, defined strategy in this era not as being “concerned with the efficient application of force but with the exploitation of potential force”. At the same time, George Kennan, another US strategist, advocated a strategy of ‘containment of Russian expansive tendencies’. Together, deterrence and containment became the hallmarks of US and Western strategy throughout most of the Cold War, drawing on game-theory and probability. As Hew Strachan once again points out, “[a]rmies and generals lost their way in the Cold War. The discipline of strategy which defined and validated the art of the commander, the business of general staffs…was no longer theirs”.42 The atrophy was echoed by André Beaufre who wrote that “the word strategy may be used often enough, but science and the art of strategy have become museum pieces…” concluding that strategy can no longer be defined as a doctrine, “it is a method of thought”.43

In 1981 the US Army Colonel, Harry Summers, published On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War, in which he described the war for America as a ‘tactical victory’ but ‘strategic defeat’. Summers argued that America understood well the need to subordinate war to policy, but what they did not “or rather the politicians – did not understand was war itself; the means to the political end.”44

Following Vietnam, strategists such as Edward Luttwak began to look at the utility and strategies of conventional war45. He argued that grand strategy takes place at a ‘governmental level’ where the appropriate knowledge and capacity to determine and direct grand strategy is located46. Peter Layton identifies that “[t]he implication of this for Luttwak is that ‘All states have a grand strategy, whether they know it or

42 Ibid. p. 429.
44 Hew Strachan, ‘Clausewitz and the Dialectics of War’: op cit. p. 34.
not. That is inevitable because grand strategy is simply the level at which knowledge and persuasion interact”\(^47\).

By 1989 the US Joint Chiefs of Staff had defined strategy as “the art and science of developing and using 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 lessen the chances of defeat”\(^48\). Michael Handel, put it more simply: “strategy is the development and use of all resources in peace and war in support of national policies to secure victory.”\(^49\) In these two definitions there is a much wider understanding of strategy, which takes on board the nexus between policy and war as its instrument, for which Clausewitz is so famous, as for him, “war…is an act of policy”\(^50\). Colin Gray – Handel’s British colleague, opined: “Strategy is the bridge that relates military power to political purpose; it is neither military power \textit{per se} nor political purpose…strategy…[is] the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy.”\(^51\) This echoes earlier thinking by Bernard Brodie who expanded the term by writing that strategy “is nothing if not pragmatic…Above all, a strategic theory for action”. The thinking of American military historians, Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley went in the same direction: “strategy is a process, a constant adaptation to shifting conditions and circumstance in a world where chance, uncertainty and ambiguity dominate.”\(^52\) And finally, the British expert on strategy, Sir Lawrence Freedman, with his political science background, put it elegantly:

\(^{49}\) Idem.
\(^{50}\) On War, I, I, 24, p. 87.
“Strategy is about the relationship between (political) ends and (military, economic, political etc.) means. It is the art of creating power”.

The purpose of this section of the paper has been to trace the development of strategic thought – theory and practice – from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. The result, as we have heard from Hew Strachan, is that the Cold War pushed strategy over the fence up to the level of politics, leading to a ‘conflation of strategy and politics’. The response of the British and American militaries to this crisis was to embrace the operational level of war, attempting to place its roots in the German military thinking of Luddendorf, Moltke and the WWII technique of Blitzkreig (lightning war); although its origins more accurately lie in Soviet thinking from such writers as A.A. Svechin. What is now taught in US and UK staff colleges as operational art is broadly strategy as Clausewitz, Jomini and Von Moltke described it, albeit Joint. It is a military approach that attempted to keep distinct the political and policymaking aspects of war from the conduct of operations. As Strachan again observes, whilst that might have been a reasonable aspiration for the conduct of corps-level warfare against the Soviet Union in northern Europe during the 1980s, and even in the desert of Iraq in 1991, it is simply no longer viable in any contemporary conflict. The next section of the paper examines why.

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56 Joint refers to the combination of elements of all three Service environments: Maritime, Land and Air. Operations can take place in a predominantely single environment i.e. land, but will usually include forces from the other two environments providing air, maritime or joint intelligence, joint communications and joint logistic support.
PART 2 – CHALLENGES OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The Nature and Character of War

As Colin Gray has written, “there is an essential unity to all strategic experiences in all periods of history because nothing vital to the nature and function of war and strategy changes”.\(^{57}\) He backs this up by drawing on Clausewitz’s idea of a separate ‘logic’ and ‘grammar’ of war, that is to say that war has its own ‘grammar’ “…a distinctive character and dynamic, of war that is inalienable, though it lacks any policy ‘logic’ of its own...New environments and new weapons will add to the pile of matters needing attention by strategists, but the nature of war and strategy, and the relationship between policy and military instrument, endure”.\(^{58}\)

But whilst the nature of war endures, its character evolves. Hew Strachan describes three key changes in the character of war since the 1990s. First, that the “distinction between war and peace that prevailed in the era of so-called ‘total war’ has been eroded.” Second, that although the word lacks precise definition, these conflicts can broadly be described as ‘asymmetric’; a catch-all term applied to any war “in which the two sides are not made up of armies equipped and organised on similar lines”. And third, that the exercise of combined arms command has shifted from the corps to division in the first half of the twentieth century, and more recently down to the level of the brigade. He describes as absurdly tautological the notion of the ‘strategic corporal’, but observes that in 2003 Tommy Franks commanding the allied forces in the Gulf was forced to react to “…the improvement in real-time communications [that] allows politicians to fulfil their desire to establish direct controls at lower levels of command.”\(^{59}\) The important consequence of this is that although soldiers might argue that the politician should stay clear of the soldier’s business and remain within his own sphere of influence, war waged in ‘rogue’ or ‘failed states’ — state building — is shaping and formulating policy as it fights\(^{60}\).

\(^{58}\) Ibid. p. 93
\(^{60}\) Ibid. p. 72.
In 2010 Dr Robin Niblett gave written evidence to the House of Commons Public Administration Committee on the subject of Who Does UK Grand Strategy? Drawing on work by Chatham House, he broadly defines the key trends that characterise the changing international context for the UK. These are: “the shift in [the] global centre of economic and political gravity from West to East; the growing competition for resources that is accompanying this shift; new patterns and characteristics of conflict, where non-state actors using a combination of basic and sophisticated technologies can stymie forces that are far superior in number and equipment; the decline in US power relative to emerging powers and non-state actors; a Europe that appears to be hobbled by negative demographics and a lack of institutional coherence at the EU level; and the emergence of new structures of global governance involving a more diverse and self-confident range of countries.”

The Nature and Character of Strategy

Colin Gray writes that the “under-appreciation [sic] of the inherently competitive nature of a strategic context probably has been the most damaging source of poor to catastrophic strategic performance”. He cites Edward N. Luttwak as to “the leading source for the paradox and irony that [he] brilliantly exposes as being central to the very nature of strategy is the presence of an independent, indeed interdependent, player on the field – the enemy.” But the idea of a duel that Luttwak describes, as Gray observes further ‘can be overworked’. The presence of an enemy is without doubt an enduring and key feature of strategy, but in a contemporary context there is a need to recognise also the dynamic of the friendly forces, one that it is increasingly characterised by a need for legitimacy through popular support and allies, with all of the complications this brings for strategy-making and its execution. As Strachan tellingly observes, “committees tend not to do or produce good strategic thinking”. Today this inhibits not only the development

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61 See Robin Niblett, Playing to its Strengths: Rethinking the UK’s Role in a Changing World (London: Chatham House, 2010); and Alex Evans and David Steven, Organizing for Influence: UK Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty (London: Chatham House, 2010)


of national strategy through an increasingly broad civil-military collective, but equally in the multi-national nature of modern alliances.

The UK’s deliberate move away from the historical term ‘grand strategy’ to ‘national strategy’, primarily because of the former’s overtones of empire, has left us with a further conflation of thought on grand and national strategy. Because of a move towards alliances, the levers of grand strategy that include armed force, wealth and economics, diplomacy and opinion are now firmly back in play. There is some acknowledgement of this in Whitehall with a recent Cabinet Office memorandum on the subject acknowledging that national and grand strategy are not synonymous, and that “the latter historical term has wider utility, despite its somewhat dated feel.”65

Strategy-Making in the UK Today

Some commentators have suggested that articulating a ‘vision’, or an expression of culture and values may be more useful than attempting to articulate a grand strategy. However, the UK does appear able to articulate a coherent view of strategy as captured in its 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) that arguably goes beyond mere values or a vision, namely “to use all our national capabilities to build Britain’s prosperity, extend our nation’s influence in the world and strengthen our security.”66 But criticisms that the UK government remains too tactically focused on current operational issues in response to media and parliament remain. As recently as February 2013 Parliament’s Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy accused the National Security Council (NSC) of a number of continuing failings in developing strategy.67

Whilst Hew Strachan has argued that in the context of diminishing resources

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the need for a grand strategy is even more acute, Charles Style observes that the reality in Whitehall and amongst the Armed Services is “internecine squabbling and Service rivalry…and a strategic tension between Britain’s internationalist aspirations and its reducing defence capabilities.” This is exacerbated by a wider government inability to get government departments to work properly together as also observed by the 2012 Joint Committee Report on the NSC. One of the key challenges is that in committing armed force and other national instruments, the government wants to be reassured of success. But in order to secure success, the Armed Forces themselves, as well as other contributing governments departments argue for a large amount of resources to underwrite that success. This creates a tension in both inter and intra-departmental priorities, one that is exacerbated by the nature of the complex and uncertain problems they are attempting to address and which defy clear solutions. It is to this area that the paper now briefly turns.

‘Wicked’ Problems

Changes in the character of war and shifts in the strategic environment have created new, more complex problems described by some as ‘wicked’. Keith Grint refines the original idea of ‘wicked’ to mean “a problem that cannot be removed from its environment, solved, and returned without affecting the environment.” A key challenge in dealing with wicked problems as Grint observes is that “[T]here are often no ‘stopping points’ with wicked problems – that is the point at which the problem is solved”. For example, the military opponent might be defeated, but the underlying problems of political grievance and social disenfranchisement often remain.

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70 See Rittell and Webber’s (1973) typology of Tame and Wicked Problems, in Keith Grint (2008).
72 Ibid. p. 308.
Grint’s thesis is that such problems require to be addressed through an ‘art of leadership’, but critically that wicked problems defy decisive leadership because the leadership’s knowledge is imperfect and the consequences of their actions uncertain. Drawing upon Etzioni’s (1964) typology of compliance he concludes that you cannot “force people to follow you in addressing a wicked problem because the nature of the problem demands that followers want to have to help” 74, an assertion that has obvious implications for alliances. Grint goes on to argue that wicked problems require a response of collaborative engagement where leadership is key in “persuading the collective to take responsibility for collective problems”.75

Dealing with complex problems requires first an understanding of the problem. But, if Grint is right, perfect understanding will be illusory in dealing with wicked problems. This chimes with the ‘Heisenberg principle’, which argues that there is a fundamental limit to the precision with which a totality of information can be known76. Further, since ‘understanding’ scores low on Bloom’s Taxonomy77 of the cognitive dimension process, we might be selling ourselves short aiming for it. Instead, an ability to ‘infer’ from the circumstances we are faced with, to ‘analyse’ and ‘evaluate’, and ultimately to ‘create’ are better goals. The product of this ‘create’ process is strategy in the contemporary strategic environment. Since our knowledge and understanding is evolving, and because as Strachan tells us we are shaping and formulating policy as we fight, that strategy will need to be more dynamic than Clausewitz and his contemporary classical strategists imagined. The next section examines some of the evidence for this.

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74 Idem.
75 Ibid. p. 313.
76 Heisenberg Principle: From Werner Heisenberg’s (1927) experiment in quantum mechanics.
77 Bloom’s taxonomy (revised) describes an educational model for thinking in which creating, analysing and evaluating are the higher levels of thinking, whilst applying, understanding and remembering are lower levels. See: http://www.kurwongbss.qld.edu.au/thinking/Bloom/blooms.htm
PART 3 – CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS AND THE CASE FOR
‘REDPOINTING’

Part 1 described how the Cold War led to a conflation of strategy and politics. Charles Style echoes this view when he writes, that “Britain lost certain habits of mind: thinking big, thinking round corners…refining simplicity from complexity…[and] driving the agenda upwards towards strategy (not downwards towards the sub-tactical).”

The paper also considered in Part 1 how as the United States looked for a new approach after its experience in Vietnam, there was a rejection of that conflict’s lessons on counter-insurgency and state-building and instead a move “to what it called the ‘operational level’ of war” with its focus on manoeuvre. It was this war that was fought in the Gulf in 1991 and its success set the trajectory for the US and (in the main) UK forces thereafter. As Strachan points out, although “many nineteenth century commanders would have described [it] as strategy, the operational level of war is not strategy in itself, any more than it is policy. The problem of strategy is located on the fault line between policy and the operational level.”

When, in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre, America embraced a ‘war on terror’, its thinking was “profoundly astrategic”, directed as it was not towards a political goal but a means of fighting, with an agenda that lacked any geographical precision. Rumsfield’s answer to aligning means and ways with ends was not to seek an adjustment of either means or ends, but to insist that US forces adapt to his ways; power projection and global access. The approach he took was capability based through a process of ‘transformation’ that was neither policy nor strategy. As a result, the war in Afghanistan was waged without a strategy. In a typical Rumsfieldian moment that presaged his now eponymous ‘known-unknowns

78 Charles Style: op cit. p. 42.
80 The UK military remained committed in Northern Ireland, albeit at reduced levels of intensity through the 1990s, until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 signalled a drawdown culminating in the end of Operation Banner in 2007.
82 Ibid. p. 59.
and unknown unknowns’ address (Feb 12, 2002), Rumsfield acknowledged in Autumn 2001, “we have to say things in a general way because we don’t know what we’re going to do until we get there”.83

In 2003 George Bush embarked on a mission of regime change in Iraq whilst his key ally, Tony Blair, committed UK forces on the basis of a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) threat. The undeclared ‘strategy’ of Blair was simply to remain close to the United States. But blind faith in what Britain assumed would be the US’ strategy for post-conflict resolution and stabilisation (Phase 4) led to a protracted and at times politically embarrassing embroilment in Iraq as the UK struggled to match resources with an expanding task amid continuing doubts about its legitimacy.

In 2006 a buoyed ISAF expanded its mission in Afghanistan. The UK agreed to take the lead in Helmand Province, but as Style admits, the Helmand plan was not properly nested in the NATO operation; rather it was seen as a discrete UK operation. “In London” he says, “there was a dominating preoccupation with Helmand.”84 The situation was exacerbated because, even as the UK was force generating and had deployed 16 Air Assault Brigade(-) to Helmand in 2006, the UK government and Ministry of Defence (MOD) was attempting to draw down in Iraq to balance its means between the theatres. However, circumstances on the ground in Iraq and relations with the United States conspired against those aspirations.

It soon became clear that in Afghanistan the UK lacked any meaningful understanding of the economic, political and social situation in Helmand – let alone an ability to accurately analyse, evaluate and create. Echoing Rumsfield, Josh Arnold-Forster, Special Adviser (SPAD) to the Secretary of State for Defence John Reid (2005-06) wrote in the RUSI Journal (2012) that getting a better understanding and information “can only really be gathered through dialogue and conversation – essentially through physical presence on the ground.”85 Matt Cavanagh, another SPAD, argues that the dominating idea in Whitehall and MOD at the time was that

84 Charles Style: op cit. p. 40.
the deployment was an expression of UK influence; that it “was going to happen…so we might as well get on with it.”\textsuperscript{86} The implication of this is that although planners had reservations, they were going to have work through them to deploy a force that in conjunction with politicians would build policy and strategy as it went; Strachan’s key point.

Numerous factors have been cited for a lack of UK strategy in respect of Afghanistan. Mungo Melvin, for one, articulates: The widening of the campaign remit in Helmand in early 2006; shifting priorities of the US; national and institutional parochialism in Helmand; the absence of a focus for strategic planning and strategy-making in Whitehall; a lack of understanding of Afghanistan and particularly the Pashtun south; a failure to educate leaders and planners to think strategically; a lack of resources, primarily helicopters and protected mobility assets; and the lack of a meaningful contingency reserve.\textsuperscript{87}

Similarly, failings were apparent in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which itself eschewed strategy and supplanted it with budget control. It became financially driven because the ‘Adaptable Britain’ model selected covered all scenarios and therefore led to a predominantly salami-slicing solution. In fact, not since 1997 has the UK had a truly policy-led security review. The much vaunted efforts of Prime Minister Cameron’s nascent government in 2010 in the end developed the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the SDSR in parallel. As Mark Phillips points out, “[A]n essential requirement for the success of future reviews is therefore the early publication of an NSS which clearly defines and prioritises the UK’s non-discretionary national interests for security…”\textsuperscript{88}

Even the strategy in Libya 2011 had its detractors. Steven Jermy argued that the initial campaign demonstrated yet again that the UK is still not able to think

strategically in pursuit of the national interest\textsuperscript{89}. Amongst a number of reasons for this, he declares that we still struggle to identify the political context – identifying regime change rather than the UN authorised protection of civilians as the strategic goal. And linking back to the 2010 SDSR, he argues that the decision to discontinue the UK’s carrier air capability left us poorly placed to execute the operation as effectively as we otherwise might.

So it appears we have still yet to learn properly the lessons from history, both from classical and contemporary strategists, and from conflict itself. But whilst some may doubt the continuing relevance of Clausewitz and his contemporaries, there appears to be plenty of evidence to support a case for their utility.

Clausewitz does not confine himself to notions of ‘absolute war’, although he writes mostly about it. He also captures the idea of ‘limited’ war set in the context of war as a total phenomena; a clash of wills, his trinities, and where war is subordinated to political aims. Clausewitz himself lectured on ‘small wars’ at the Berliner Kriegsschule in 1811-12, analysed guerrilla warfare in the Vendée 1793-6, the Tyrolean uprising in 1809, and most prominently the Spanish insurrection from 1808. As Christopher Daase points out, in book VI (defence) of \textit{On War} Clausewitz includes a chapter on ‘The People in Arms’, which deals with the practical as well as theoretical aspects of popular uprising and guerrilla warfare\textsuperscript{90}. His image of guerrillas as “smouldering embers” that eat away at the edges of an enemy army would come to seem prescient in light of the revolutions, people’s wars, and partisan resistance of the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{91}

Antulio J. Echevarria II argues that globalisation, which has been a factor in the ‘war on terror’, has brought the elements of Clausewitz’s trinity, the tendencies of purpose (political), hostility (enmity and violence), and chance (friction) closer together, making the effects of their interaction more immediate, less predictable, and

\textsuperscript{89} House of Commons Defence Committee, 9\textsuperscript{th} Report, Operations in Libya Vol. II 2010-12, (London TSO, 2011), Written Evidence by Cdre Steve Jermy, Ev w1-4.
potentially more influential. In his view, “understanding the relationship of subjective
to the objective nature of war may be more important than in Clausewitz’s day, since
the room for error appears to be less”\textsuperscript{92}. Arguments by Martin van Creveld \textit{et al} that
the ‘war on terror’ does not fit within Clausewitz’s trinity miss the point, because as
Hew Strachan pointedly observes, the trinity in question is not the people,
government and military but the tendencies of hostility, purpose and chance. Indeed,
Clausewitz even appears to stand the test of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)
and the impacts of information warfare, not least because as Colin Gray so neatly
observes “…strategy is about, and is done by people”\textsuperscript{93}.

It is also necessary to draw a distinction between strategic practise and strategic
theory. That is to say, there is a separation between the crafting and execution of
strategy for war’s changing character, and thinking about strategy and its nature more
broadly. In democratic states today it is politicians not generals that own strategy, but
politicians do not generally think about or ‘do strategy’. In Hew Strachan’s view,
politicians make pragmatic, common-sense decisions based on political circumstance
and their experience; this is strategy in practise, not wholly removed from what
Clausewitz called the \textit{coup d’oeil}, a form of reason broadly synonymous with
intuition in strategy-making. But whilst this is in itself a valuable tool for strategists,
there needs to be a more deliberate thinking process in developing strategy that acts
as a check on intuition. As Carr and Sparks have observed, thinking both intuitively
and deliberately is vital in developing strategy.\textsuperscript{94} Without it, ‘strategy in practise’
risks becoming strategy in name alone.

Strategic practise must also communicate, but herein lies a further challenge.
Our strategy needs to resonate with numerous audiences: domestic, international and
often a host population amongst whom a conflict is being played out. But even if we
can align the ends, ways and means of our strategy, can we align our words, actions
and deeds in our efforts to communicate effectively and to develop a compelling
narrative that resonates? And even if we can, there is still inherent risk to our strategy

\textsuperscript{92} Antulio J. Echevarria II, ‘Clausewitz and the Nature of the War on Terror’, in Hew Strachan and
\textsuperscript{94} See Karen Carr (Prof) and Emma Sparks (Dr), \textit{Thinking Skills for Strategic Capability: a
because we cannot control how audiences interpret and pass-on that communication\textsuperscript{95}. The obvious implication is that strategic practise needs to take account of audiences and how they react, something that is impossible to know beforehand.

So, in 2013, in spite of globalisation, a shift towards a more peaceful world, a move away from state-on-state conflict, a rise of religious extremism, growth in conflict between states and non-state actors, and a disposition of states to seek legitimacy through alliances, Clausewitz and other strategists such as Von Moltke, Jomini, Beaufre, Liddell Hart, Fuller, Brody and Gray have enduring value. But there remains the issue that strategy has become synonymous in government with policy, that operational art has stolen the space occupied by nineteenth century interpretations of strategy, and that post the global financial crisis resources in western governments and amongst armed forces are going to require increasingly careful husbanding. This complicates strategy-making, for even if we can rediscover the lost meaning of strategy and exercise the discipline to bring rigour and definition to the term and its use in government, the alignment of \textit{ends}, \textit{ways} and \textit{means} to make and execute that strategy will be impacted by a lack of understanding and shifting relationships in alliances. The dynamics of strategy have altered. No longer are we fighting simply a vertical dynamic that is shaped by our own objectives, activity and the enemy’s, but we are also contending with a horizontal dynamic that is about alliances, imperfect understanding, evolving opportunities and threats, and ever more competing priorities against shrinking resource. One approach to deal with these twin dynamics is ‘redpointing’. Allow me to explain

Whilst strategy remains primarily about competition and power, a duel between two adversaries, the decisive encounter that so often characterises a duel and was championed by Clausewitz is rarely possible today. This is because either the actors we are in conflict with avoid, or do not lend themselves to such an encounter, or because our lack of understanding and the complex nature of the problems we face – ‘wicked’ if you will – defy a decisive solution. The future challenge of strategy therefore might simply be getting to the next stage in a series of encounters. As such,

\textsuperscript{95} See MOD Joint Doctrine Note 1/12, \textit{Strategic Communication: The Defence Contribution}, MOD / DCDC (Shrivenham, 2012).
strategy-making will be characterised more by working forwards from a set level of means towards a specified end, through ways that are acceptable to allies, international institutions and often a host nation.

In the past we have acknowledged that “[s]trategy is not a game that states can play by themselves”\(^{96}\); the enemy gets a vote. Clausewitz’s concept of friction remains as valid as ever, perhaps even more so. We recognise too the difficulties of any decision to commit to discretionary conflicts where national survival is not immediately at stake, where competing priorities for expenditure and the temptations of short-term expediency impact, and where the challenge is often complicated by the need to secure and maintain popular support for the campaign.\(^{97}\) But somehow, through the evolution of strategy since the 1780s and the lessons of recent expeditions to Iraq and Afghanistan, we have failed to grasp that strategy does not simply evolve on its own to take account of altered circumstances, enemy action and changed political contexts, as if somehow the original strategy would have prevailed in a more benign environment. Rather, strategy must be inherently dynamic; a living, iterative thing that needs constant review and adaptation. As Harry Yarger observes, strategy should be “[P]roactive not predictive, seeking to influence and shape the ongoing future, rather than trying to set a final end”.\(^{98}\)

The over-assumption hitherto has been that if we can correctly identify the political ends, commit the means and develop the ways, our strategy should succeed acknowledging some need for minor adjustment on the way. In fact, identifying the political end in conflicts short of national survival is extremely difficult, because the acceptability of those ends will change with public perceptions, political persuasions, economic pressures and the need for a series of shifting compromises to bind an alliance. Thus, rather than lamenting an absence of strategy as defined over the last two centuries, we might usefully choose to embrace a more incremental approach to strategy-making. One where the ultimate ends might be unclear, but where lesser


\(^{97}\) Defence Academy of the UK, The Royal College of Defence Studies, *Thinking Strategically*: *op cit*. p. 16

\(^{98}\) Harry Yarger: *Ibid*; p. 9
ends can be both articulated and matched with appropriate means and employed through legitimate ways.

In part the problem can be defined thus: When government is faced with a security crisis or threat, its first response is not to declare an unequivocal political objective, but instead to ask Defence and other governments departments what ‘might be done about it – what are our options?’ The Departments, unsurprisingly respond by stating that ‘what might be done’ depends on what the government ‘wants done – the outcomes’. The government’s response more often than not is then to declare that they need to understand the range of options first to determine the most appropriate and acceptable outcomes; governments want to understand their ‘choices’.

The national response that follows is developed through a dialogue with the military, other government departments and, more often than not today, allies. As such a ‘strategy’ of sorts is developed, but it often misaligns the means and the ends for reasons of political and financial exigency. It also misaligns the ways because the problem is not amenable to straightforward solutions, and because we lack understanding. On this basis, our challenge to ‘create’ a strategy, and in particular its ways, may be flawed from the outset; wars rarely end with the same objectives they start with. In Vietnam the presence of foreign troops created new problems; it changed the environment. To a degree this happened in Iraq and Afghanistan too, but the former’s quantum shift was from regime change and WMD to counter-insurgency (COIN), a task for which the troops at that time were neither trained nor resourced for. In Afghanistan the initial task of tackling Al Qaeda (AQ) and terrorism ultimately morphed into state-building and COIN against the Taliban, whilst systemic weakness in government remains. And in spite of its intellectual and policy strengths, the 1997 SDSR was utterly pulled off-course by the events of 11 September 01 and the enduring character of the conflicts that have followed.

In his article on the strategic lessons from Afghanistan, Mungo Melvin writes astutely that: “The strategic calculus of evaluating and integrating ends, ways and means, all within a complex and shifting political and operational environment, let alone developing a workable plan, is not easy. It requires judgements based on the best available information at the time of decision. It is therefore not an exact science;
neither is it wholly an art. Numbers and calculations, particularly over force ratios, densities and logistics, are necessary. Paradoxically, long-term results may prove incalculable as the more one tries to determine the responses of one’s opponents, the more uncertain outcomes may become. It requires broader knowledge than merely of military issues: an understanding of cultural, social, political and economic matters is equally important. Above all, it demands an ability to think strategically, which not all, even the brightest and highest ranking possess.”

His ultimate point, slightly disconnected to the enduring truism above, is that strategy-making must derive the most appropriate and affordable strategy early rather than too late, and resource it sufficiently from the outset.

The difficulty with this is that it assumes a near perfect understanding of the problem. A more viable and pragmatic approach is ‘redpointing’ where a strategy is developed with properly aligned ends, ways and means at the outset, but where the ends are set consciously low. Such a strategy does not seek the decisive battle, but seeks to create through lesser engagements, incrementally, the opportunities for exploitation that Clausewitz described as the objective of his decisive engagement. Such opportunities drive in turn a deliberate refining of the strategy, emphasising its inherently dynamic nature. At the same time, it allows politicians to exercise choice. But, and this is crucial, if the opportunities are to be exploited properly, there will need to be a strategic reserve available across all of the national instruments, and there will need to be an early consideration of how the strategy might develop in a similar way to a campaign plan with its branches and sequels. The means and potential ways to achieve this must be considered as part of the initial strategy. In this way, strategy-making can re-discover its original roots and steal back some of the ground lost to operational art.

This is not advocacy for an absence of strategy. Rather it is an evolution in strategic thinking that follows from its expansion in the twentieth century and sets it up for the challenges of the twenty-first century. Consider how such an approach might have worked in Iraq? The strategy would have been properly crafted and aligned for the March 2003 invasion, but it would have needed to be re-evaluated and

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re-crafted both in the discovery that there was no US-led Phase 4 stabilisation plan, and it would have needed to be revised again as the country descended into a sectarian civil-war. The strategic reserve would have been committed and another generated. In Afghanistan it would have precluded the ‘charge up’ the Sangin Valley by 16 Air Assault Brigade in 2006 without a revision of the initial strategy for the Helmand deployment, and it would have led to a better alignment of ends, ways and means between the Iraq and Afghanistan theatres throughout 2006-2008.

Rather than a creeping evolution of the initial strategy, it is implicit in ‘redpointing’ that strategy will be revised and re-crafted as conditions on the ground dictate, as political will and priorities shift, both domestically and across the alliance. It is equally implicit that the strategy will be developed – or more accurately ‘created’ as our understanding and ability to analyse and evaluate the conflict improves. And finally, it will be explicit to both allies, cross-government, domestic audiences and the media that the initial strategy with clearly defined ends and aligned ways and means will be developed further as the campaign unfolds. In Libya, for example, it would have meant an initial deployment only to protect civilians as per the UN mandate. Revision of the strategy to enable the subsequent move to regime change would have been deliberate, expected and natural. As a result, it would have deflected accusations of incoherent strategy and addressed current accusations of blight in strategic thinking.

PART 4 - CONCLUSION

In this paper we have traced the development of classical strategic thought from Clausewitz to current conflicts and established the continuing relevance of such thinking. On War, which, is more about war, strategy and tactics than strategy and policy remains valid, but Clausewitz is not without difficulty; interpretations of Centres of Gravity and the subjugation of war to politics can be taken too literally. In the nineteenth century, strategy, as Jomini and Von Moltke tell us, was something done by generals, not politicians. But, after World War I strategy and policy began to be integrated in a way they had not been previously. And although in World War II the allied Chiefs of Staff practised ‘grand strategy’, subsequently there was a conflating of strategy and policy in the context of total war. The Cold War that followed robbed the generals of strategy and passed it to government. To fill the void,
the generals embraced operational art. Oddly, this was broadly was what nineteenth century strategists were describing when they crafted their original text.

Although the nature of war is unchanging, war’s character does change. Contemporary conflict is different from those of the early twentieth and nineteenth centuries in its character, even if its nature – *passion and violence; chance, opportunity and uncertainty; and reason in policy* – remains the same. Today it is not just the enemy that impacts strategy, but also a changed political order, globalisation, economics, a multitude of actors, communications and media, and alliances. In this context it is apparent that the UK has struggled to both think strategically and to develop strategy; lessons from Iraq, Afghanistan and even Libya abound. The problems we face today, particularly in ‘wars among the people’, are not amenable to straightforward solutions. Indeed, ‘wicked’ problems defy solutions because their very nature means that any attempt to solve them will change the problem. The issue is compounded because our understanding of these problems is flawed. So, we need to develop better ways not only to understand, but critically, also to analyse and evaluate the problem from where we can ‘create’ a strategy to deal with it.

But for all of this change and complexity, much of the classical thinking on strategy remains valid, not least because it is mostly about the enduring nature of war and strategy rather than its character. However, differences between strategic theory and practise do need to be taken into account, notably in the recognition that strategic practise will be impacted by our inability to determine how the messages from our strategy are interpreted by audiences.

The decisive encounter Clausewitz sought should not been seen as about tactical defeat, but by its ultimate purpose of an opportunity for exploitation. Today, that exploitation is not simply political. Since we are fighting and making policy as we go, the exploitation must come in both domains manifested as the opportunity to move the campaign on to its next step. Thus, strategy has become less about end states and more about moving the campaign on from a point with set means. Traditional models and thinking on strategy confound this approach. If we are to be more successful in the sorts of conflict we currently face, we will need a new approach to strategy-making that accommodates contemporary challenges.
For conflicts of discretion where national survival is not immediately at risk, ‘redpointing’ strategy seeks to build strategy in an agile and incremental way, acknowledging the “…even greater truth, that strategy is done as tactics”\textsuperscript{100} In an iterative and dynamic process, ‘redpointing’ strategy embraces both operational art and policy-making and stitches a seam between the two. It is not an alternative to strategy in the classical sense for existential challenges to national survival, but merely seeks to bring clarity and rigour to less grave challenges that recent evidence suggests is lacking.

\textsuperscript{100} Colin S. Gray, 'Schools for Strategy': \textit{op cit}. p. 6.
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