



ROUNDTABLE:

Remembering Sir Michael Howard (1922–2019)

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Note from the Editor: *Late last year, Texas National Security Review publisher Ryan Evans came across a lecture delivered by the eminent military historian Sir Michael Howard at the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1967. The lecture embodied many of the themes developed in historian Cathal Nolan’s 2017 book, The Allure of Battle, and Evans and Nolan thought that it could serve as an interesting focal point for a roundtable. As the roundtable was coming together, Howard passed away on Nov. 30, 2019, at age 97. The roundtable, which had begun as a reflection on one of his works, evolved into an appreciation of Howard as a scholar, mentor, and shaper of the fields of history and strategy. In the essays below, we hear from a variety of voices: Beatrice Heuser, a student of Howard’s and now a prominent professor in her own right, offers a glimpse into Howard’s influence on her thinking and career. Margaret Martin is the chair of the history department at the Air Force Academy, where Howard’s lecture was delivered, and where the Harmon lecture series continues. In her essay, she explores the ways in which the themes of his lecture are of enduring importance to aspiring officers today. Thomas Crosbie, a military sociologist teaching at a defense academy in Europe, likewise finds in Howard’s words important guidance for those training their minds for the military profession. Cathal Nolan broadens the themes developed by Howard in his lecture and explores his influence on the profession of history. Finally, Paul Miles, a soldier-scholar, shares how a chance encounter with Howard early in his career helped to shape his views, both of war and of history. The full text of Howard’s 1967 Harmon Lecture, “Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare,” is reproduced at the end of this roundtable.*

1. Introduction: Captain Professor Sir: Some Lessons from Michael Howard

By Beatrice Heuser

In 1967, the professor of war studies of King's College London, then still an integral part of the University of London, was invited to give the ninth Harmon Memorial Lecture in Military History at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Ostensibly speaking about "Strategy and Policy in 20th-Century Warfare," the speaker, Michael Howard, used this occasion to make a plug for widening military history to become more of a historiography of war. He argued it should explain the traditional campaign history in the larger context of the history of war, which, in turn, is an intrinsic part of the history of society. Combat activities should be seen as "methods of implementing national policy, to be assessed in the light of political purposes which they are intended to serve."¹ Influenced by Edward Mead Earle's famous *Makers of Strategy*, he identified this linkage between "national policy" and the use of force as "strategy." Almost 40 years later, this is how he put it in his biography:

The history of war, I came to realize, was more than the operational history of armed forces. It was the study of entire societies. Only by studying their cultures could one come to understand what it was that they fought about and why they fought in the way that they did. Further, the fact that they did so fight had a reciprocal impact on their social structure. I had to learn not only to think about war in a different way, but also to think about history itself in a different way. I would certainly not claim to have invented the concept of 'War and Society', but I think I did something to popularize it.²

I first encountered Michael Howard when his star was at its zenith and he was invited to give another celebrated lecture to another set of students, this time civilians. In 1981, as the incumbent of Britain's most prestigious chair in modern history — the Regius Chair, which is appointed by the monarch on the prime minister's advice — he gave the annual Creighton Lecture at the University of London. It was the last peak of the Cold War, and the lecture,

¹ Michael Howard, *Strategy and Policy in 20th century Warfare*, 9th Harmon Memorial Lecture in Military History (Colorado: United States Air Force Academy, 1967), 2.

² Michael Howard, *Captain Professor: The Memoirs of Sir Michael Howard* (London: Continuum, 2006), 145.

entitled “The Causes of War,”³ was given in the University’s Senate House, Britain’s most glorious fascistoid piece of architecture. Into this lecture I drifted, then myself a confused history student at the London School of Economics and a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to find that it was the most inspiring thing I had heard on the subject of war. Sitting in the cold marble Art Deco lecture room, I realized that I had discovered my academic model: a scholar who started a lecture with Thucydides’ explanation of the origins of the Peloponnesian War and ended it with a pointer to the horrendous dangers inherent in balance-of-power thinking. He conjured up the nightmare that a nuclear power might be tempted to go to war to prevent an adversarial nuclear power from growing to the point that it would become unbeatable. Not only did he articulate the fears of Campaigners for Nuclear Disarmament, but he also intuitively caught the essence of how Soviet military leaders felt in the face of NATO’s deployment of the Euromissiles or Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces.⁴

Moreover, here was a historian who did not hesitate to sketch the big picture. I had had my fill of lecturers who, when asked about parallels across time and space, claimed not to be able to comment because that was “not their period.” I had also had my fill of lecturers who thought the study of history was worth pursuing because it was intriguing, entertaining, and fascinating, but who proclaimed that history should be studied exclusively for its own sake — that it holds no wisdom for the present. I realized that I had found the approach to history that I have since made my own, not *l’art pour l’art* or history as entertainment, but a database for the study of human behavior, our only guide to understanding *rerum causas* — the origins of things, of configurations of the present and the future.

³ This is printed as the first chapter in Howard, *The Causes of Wars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1983, reprinted by Unwin paperbacks).

⁴ The Soviet hawks, we recall, were afraid of a NATO surprise attack with these weapons which could pass under the radar (cruise missiles) or take so little time to reach the Soviet Union that Moscow might not have time to react. See, Beatrice Heuser: “The Soviet Response to the Euromissile Crisis, 1982-83,” in *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, ed. Leopoldo Nuti (London: Routledge, 2008), 137-49.

Howard was well aware of the potential for abuse of history.⁵ History, he said, does not teach lessons; historians do, some wisely, some less so. New evidence constantly emerges, requiring a constant re-evaluation of our understanding of past times, just when we thought we understood this causality or that period reasonably well.⁶ Historians can make few predictions of the future, but as historians perceived with glee, particularly in the late 1980s, the many theories of international relations could not do more. History furnishes us with *patterns* — not identical patterns as found in wallpaper, which would allow us to formulate a verifiable, hard-and-fast theory that whenever there is a grey circle, then a brown square follows. But we do find an erratic, unreliable but nevertheless discernible repetition of basic configurations — structure and process, in the words of Howard⁷ — of human interactions, such as jealousy and competitive behavior between rivals and colleagues; the dynamics of group decision-making in a cabinet of ministers or the NATO Council; inter-service rivalry; conspiracy theories; bureaucratic politics; the individual's temptation to defect from the group and follow his or her own, shortsighted, narrow interests; and the distrust of any rising power, however peaceful and democratic it is, and the dangerous window-of-opportunity thinking that might bring on avoidable conflicts. History also provides examples of moral dilemmas that resurface time and again: what balance to strike between the liberty of the individual and the sacrifice made for the collectivity or how to identify the lesser evil, given that the choice in politics and international relations is generally between several bad options, rarely between good and bad.

The Lessons He Taught

Two years after hearing him speak, when I applied to do a D.Phil. at Oxford, I was assigned Howard as my supervisor. I sent him a gushing note to express my excitement about this. He wrote back, kindly: "It is nice to be appreciated." He must have wondered how to respond to this effervescence of enthusiasm, and clearly, his British reserve kicked in.

⁵ See, Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," in *The Causes of Wars*, 208–17; and Howard, *The Lessons of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), containing lectures he gave when at Oxford.

⁶ Howard, *The Lessons of History*, 11.

⁷ Howard, *The Lessons of History*, 188–200.

When, in the second year of my DPhil, he absconded to Princeton for a sabbatical, however, he wrote glowing reports home in private letters about the enthusiasm of American students (letters now in the Liddell Hart Archive at King's College London). So he too could gush, but only in private!

I worked with him for long enough then, and later, to take on board some of the major lessons he passed on beyond that of marrying history and the present. One was that of his engagement as government adviser: I have never seen the point of studying international relations if one does not want to engage with practitioners. Knighted in 1986 and honored with further distinctions, Sir Michael Howard has been greatly honored by the British establishment, even though it was not always plain sailing, as his opposition to a number of government decisions illustrates. He clearly did wield influence in Whitehall through his articulate and lucid statements at conferences and the wisdom of his insights, presented in a sincere yet tactful way. His was always the approach of avoiding outrightly offending an adversary, rather seeking to persuade and to stimulate thinking. (Occasionally he gave in to the temptation of gentle mockery, but he would equally turn this on himself.)

Persuasion, rather than hostile confrontation, was to him a cardinal goal. I once was examiner to a PhD student who, to terminate NATO's intervention in Afghanistan, advocated bombing in winter the villages of tribes known to back the mujahideen. The student's argument was that it would kill enemy supporters, and those who were out during the day — gathering firewood perhaps — would die of exposure. The candidate added that “unfortunately” the “Obama circles” in Washington refused to contemplate this measure. Having read much the same about Wehrmacht tactics in occupied Russia in World War II, I was horrified, and I turned to Howard for moral guidance. His answer: make the candidate write as many pages on why it is that the “Obama circles” refuse to contemplate this measure. That would force him to take an even-handed approach to the subject.

In the same vein, Howard opposed the outlawing of “Holocaust denial” in the United Kingdom: He did not think it a parliament's business to legislate on the truth. By contrast, he thought one should not cease to engage with those denying that genocide had taken place — under German occupation, or under the Young Turks, or under Pol Pot or Mao —

and to confront them with evidence. Dialogue to him was key. In the heated debates about war and peace and nuclear deterrence, he realized a long time before many of us that Whitehall and the military had the same goal as the antinuclear campaigners: to avoid World War III. The disagreement was about how to do so, not about the goal itself. The disarmers merely showed more concern about the ever-present danger of war, including nuclear escalation, by accident or miscalculation, while the deterrers — who included Howard — argued and continue to argue that nuclear weapons make major war an impossible rational choice. As he put it in 1981,

Society may have accepted killing as a legitimate instrument of state policy, but not, as yet, suicide. For that reason, I find it hard to believe that the abolition of nuclear weapons, even if it were feasible, would be an unmixed blessing. Nothing that makes it easier for statesmen to regard war as a feasible instrument of state policy, one from which they stand to gain rather than lose, is likely to contribute to lasting peace.⁸

In the furtherance of dialogue, one of his great achievements was his leading role in setting up the Institute for Strategic Studies (later the International Institute for Strategic Studies) in London. Yet, in his memoirs, he was skeptical about the true enthusiasm with which this was greeted among government officials (the institute scrupulously refused any government financial support). He recalled: “Seldom can bureaucrats have listened so courteously to academics, and academics have basked so gladly under the happy illusion that their ideas were being taken seriously in the corridors of power.”⁹ There is no doubt, however, that this institute has provided an exceptional forum for international debate about war and peace, and for the exchange of knowledge between the government and scholars.

It was also Howard who founded the world-leading interdisciplinary department of war studies at King’s College London, which, under the leadership of his disciple, Sir Lawrence Freedman, bloomed into the world’s largest research and teaching institution on war-related subjects. Its students are not merely normal civilian undergraduates and graduates

⁸ Howard, *The Causes of Wars* (Unwin Paperback reprint, 1985), 22.

⁹ Howard, *Captain Professor*, 163.

(as in London) — its Shrivenham branch is now mainly responsible for the academic part in the education of most British higher officers.

Occasionally, this growth in war studies, pursued with great enthusiasm by lecturers and students alike, could lead to misunderstandings. When Howard was invited back to King's College from Oxford for, as usual, a very stimulating guest lecture, an undergraduate asked him, "Sir, what is your favorite war?" He took a deep breath and, realizing that just such a misunderstanding had occurred, replied with a voice like thunder: "My favorite war? Why, I hate them all!" Indeed, his memoirs of his own experience in World War II are full of regrets. These include the likely unavoidable inaction of the British contingent in Gorizia while Yugoslavs wrought their revenge on Italians for what Italian occupation forces had done to Yugoslavs shortly before.¹⁰ Years later, Howard was invited to lecture in an Italian town, and found that not everybody gave him a warm welcome: It turned out that the British contingent that had liberated it had been unaware that in a town nearby, a bloody reckoning was taking place between two different factions of Italians. He wrote in his memoirs that he was still wondering what else he could have done.¹¹ He, for one, was never so naïf as to think there was a good answer to every such question.

In dialogue with government officials as well as civilian students and military officers, Howard followed a number of rules typical of the English School of Strategic Studies, of which another captain (one world war earlier), Sir Basil Liddell Hart, was the father. It is not by accident that Liddell Hart would also become Howard's chief mentor. True to the tradition of another "captain who taught generals" (as was said of Liddell Hart), Howard passed on the following advice to his own disciples: Do not shroud your writing in jargon. Write clearly so that any halfway educated person can understand what you are saying, and cite solid historical evidence to make your point, rather than indulging in a game of theories. Find quotations from the original sources to illustrate your point; do not quote or clutter your text with the names of other academics unless you intend to disagree with them. Write and speak succinctly. Your main argument is what matters. Don't go off on

¹⁰ Howard, *Captain Professor*, 108, 114–16.

¹¹ Howard, *Captain Professor*, 109.

tangents with details that thrill you but that distract your audience and readers from the main argument.

Howard had a particular gift of finding the right words in his writing: He could summarize complex issues most beautifully and succinctly. Sitting in an antique armchair in his exquisitely decorated office at Oriel College (I have a vague memory of pastel colors including light green, grey, and pink, which he also sported in his ties), an ornate 18th-century golden clock ticking away above the fire place, he shared with his student a cup of tea or a crystal glass of sherry as well as his recipe on how to write a good lecture or chapter. It was derived from the old Oxbridge essay style: Do all your reading, then retire for the evening with a good glass of red wine. *In nocte consilium*: Rise early, write the whole thing in one go, and then go back to your notes to insert the footnotes. If you look closely, the chapters of his great think-piece books, such as *War and the Liberal Conscience* or *The Invention of Peace*, are all roughly the length of a good 50-minute lecture.

Howard also knew what scholars can and cannot contribute. His wisdom was to contribute a wider perspective, whether in a debate behind closed doors or in public, about any live issue, with an understanding of history that shed light on a topic from a different angle. Few scholars have real-time insights into diplomatic and policy-making activities or could ever have the detailed knowledge of the issues facing government officials and military officers directly involved in negotiations within governments, alliances, or other international organizations or arms control fora. Technical details of weapons systems, for example, are usually the last to be declassified. And Howard, for one, was acutely aware that changes in technology could significantly change arguments about strategy.¹² Yet, sometimes choices emerge that are clear enough even to outsiders without knowing all the technical details involved. It is especially here that scholars can weigh in and comment in ways that can enrich and enlighten the debate, as Howard did in the debate about the United Kingdom's acquisition of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces and of Trident in the early 1980s — he was against both and thought the American commitment to Europe's defense in NATO

¹² See, for example, Howard, "Surviving a Protest," first published in *Encounter* (1980), reprinted in *The Causes of Wars*, 116f.

sufficient¹³ — or the debate on the U.S. “War on Terror” following the 9/11 attacks. (In the latter context he rightly pointed out that it is nonsense to speak about waging war on an abstract noun, while promoting a conflict with terrorists to the status of war would only give them combatant protection.¹⁴) He saw that, as a historian, the best contribution he could make was to put any issue in a wider context, to highlight the bigger picture, the recurrent patterns and questions, and the ethical dimensions beyond the specific technicalities of any ongoing negotiations, while insisting on precision in language and argument. This is an important lesson that academics can learn from the career of Michael Howard: It is in such contexts that they can make themselves most useful.

Translating Clausewitz

It is often said that Howard owed his reputation above all to his book on the Franco-Prussian War.¹⁵ But his real rise to fame came when, jointly with Peter Paret, he edited a new translation of Clausewitz’s *On War*, just as, in the wake of the Vietnam debacle, the idea that America had betrayed its Napoleonic-Clausewitzian “way of war” in Vietnam and should return to a true “American Way of War” was seizing hold of the American military. Clausewitz became the flavor of the age, and Howard and Paret, together with their late colleague Angus Malcolm of the British Foreign Office, turned obsolescent German into pithy, up-to-date English prose. Clausewitz, of course, has more to offer than merely comments on high-intensive conflict or how to organize large-scale resistance (“people’s war”) against an occupation regime (an aspect of *On War* that impressed Mao Tse-tung.) Clausewitz was to give Howard much of the intellectual ammunition that he was still groping for when he gave his lecture at the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1967: As director of Prussia’s General War School, Clausewitz was at odds with his staff over their excessively positivist determination to teach warfare through formulae — what would later be called

¹³ Howard: “Surviving a Protest,” 116–33, 116f; “On Fighting a Nuclear War,” in *The Causes of Wars*, 133–50; and “Deterrence, Consensus and Reassurance in the Defence of Europe,” *Adelphi Paper*, no. 184 (London: IISS, 1983).

¹⁴ Michael Howard: “Mistake to Declare This a ‘War,’” *RUSI Journal* 146, no. 6 (2001), 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071840108446710>.

¹⁵ Michael Howard: *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (London: Hart-Davis, 1961).

the principles of warfare — and make it calculable and predictable. Clausewitz thought that “[a]ll these attempts to base the conduct of war upon arithmetic and geometrical principles are to be discarded, as the application of the rule exclude the genius [probably better translated as ‘judgment’] and limit the activity of intelligence.”¹⁶ In his “Abstract Principles of Strategy” of 1808/1809, Clausewitz wrote:

The more I think about this part of the Art of War [i.e. what we now call Strategy], the more I become convinced that its theory can posit few or even no abstract principles [*Sätze*]; but not, as is commonly thought, because the matter is too difficult, but because one would go under in stating the all-too-obvious [*Trivialitäten*].

On the one hand, he argued,

In war, there are so many petty variables [*Umstände*] which contribute to affect action that if one wanted to include them appropriately in his abstract rules, one would appear as the biggest pedant...

On the other hand, to ignore the many variables would be unrealistic.¹⁷ Nor did Clausewitz think it appropriate for the teacher to prescribe the military commander’s every actions in all contexts: Howard liked to quote the passage from *On War* in which Clausewitz defined the role of the teacher as to “educate the mind of the future military leader or rather give him guidance in his self-education, but not accompany him onto the battlefield, just as a teacher guides and facilitates the spiritual development of a youth, without, however, keeping him strapped in leading strings all his life.”¹⁸

Published in 1976, this new translation of *On War*, with its lengthy introductory chapters, gave Howard the material for many wise spin-off articles and lectures. The very next year, Howard left London for Oxford there to take up the Chichele Chair of the History of War — a chair created in 1910 as the Chair of Military History and renamed in 1946 to cover “war”

¹⁶ Quoted in Rühle’s review of *On War* in the *Allgemeine Militär Zeitung* 8, no. 3 (1833) col. 22–24. And Clausewitz: *On War*, II.2.

¹⁷ “Strategie aus dem Jahre 1809“, in *Carl von Clausewitz: Verstreute kleine Schriften*, ed. Werner Hahlweg (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1979), 46f.

¹⁸ Carl von Clausewitz: *On war*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), book II.2, 141.

more generally — which perfectly suited Howard’s agenda of moving research from traditional military history to the history of war and of strategy.

But besides being the acknowledged lead historian of war in the United Kingdom, the incumbent was the obvious person to invite to conferences — public and private — on all matters military, and to bring over to Whitehall whenever one needed a more academic (and historical) perspective on matters related to defense. Here, Howard’s forte would continue to be to provide the larger picture, and this he did outstandingly. This larger picture, and the memory of similar questions that had been on the table a decade or several decades before, is what government institutions notoriously lack, and do not have the time or manpower to research with the patience and thoroughness of a scholar.

His Legacy

What of his heritage, half a century later? The International Institute for Strategic Studies and King’s College London are flourishing and have both expanded to a size even their founder would not have dreamt of in the 1950s and 1960s. Military history has truly changed into the history of war, wherever it is tolerated. Unfortunately, that is not in many universities, as many scholars are still suspicious of anybody studying war. The “war and society” approach has grown greatly, but with a massive emphasis on social history, so that, outside the department of war studies at King’s College London, and a small handful of chairs at universities and the military academies, academics studying war are more likely to study soldiers’ wives or patterns of desertion than strategy. Graduate degrees including the term “strategy” or “strategic” are most likely to deal with business or climate change, or include a token session on Clausewitz, taught by somebody with at best a passing acquaintance with the Paret and Howard translation, rarely the ability to read his works in the original. The English school of strategic studies, of which Howard’s obituaries proclaim him to be a scion if not the founder, is now threatened by extinction. It just about flourishes still in the department of war studies at King’s College London, but that is not immune from the steady spread of jargon, reductionism — “one independent variable, one dependent variable” — and confirmation bias — “this essay will argue” or “this article will show that.” Also waning are sensitivities for cultural diversity and the acquisition of “the language of the past” — and of other languages *tout court*. They have been drowned in “monoglot

illiteracy” (to quote Lord Dacre)¹⁹ and the ever-increasing fashion of quantitative and theoretical analysis that has flooded Europe coming from — sorry, folks — American academe. Historical evidence — particularly anything that happened more than about 30 years ago — is disregarded or brushed aside, myths are created and happily passed on if they fit theories, and the names of obscure scholars and the jargon-heavy, and worse still monocausal, theories they have produced reign supreme. Encrypted language prevails in this discourse addressed exclusively at the initiates, which is also true for most internal government documents, although the acronyms and the jargon differ from those of the social scientists. This makes dialogue between academics and practitioners a dialogue of the deaf. It should thus perhaps not surprise us that an increasing number of international relations scholars see no way to — and have no ambition to — make themselves useful to government: Speaking different languages, they would not be able to communicate anyway. Others, with their three-case-studies approach, will claim to have created, proved, or disproved theories that, in reality, have no predictive quality for the next case. But it would be dangerous in the extreme to expose civil servants or military officers with an engineering background to such theories, which might fit even complex machines, but not the much greater complexity of multiple human interactions.

Meanwhile, the split in academia between history and international relations seems complete in all but a handful of universities, with a few aging academics still keeping a foot in both camps. Gone from international relations is an understanding that human societies are constantly evolving and are not an unalterable clockwork, the mechanism of which can be understood by any one theory. International relations, as taught today, seems to have begun in 1991, or at best, in 1945 (with a brief back-hand to a supposed Westphalian system that never existed and a Soviet-American division of the world at Yalta, which never happened), and furnishes an eclectic database — usually centering on U.S. foreign policy — for largely abstract theoretical cloud-cuckoo lands. Howard’s eminent successors as Chichele Professors of the History of War were progressively barred from supervising doctoral students who were not working on a purely historical subject with a narrowly historiographic methodology. Brilliant students, often military officers, from the world over had come specifically to study with Howard, and after him, Robert O’Neill (one of his own

¹⁹ Howard, *The Lessons of History*, 13, 18.

disciples, and one-time director of the International Institute of Strategic Studies) and Hew Strachan (who had previously founded the Scottish Centre for War Studies at the University of Glasgow). For the last decade or so, they found themselves turned away from working with the Chichele Professor if their subjects had a strong contemporary angle. Instead those students were kept firmly in the social sciences faculty, as though understanding what happened after 1945 differed from what happened before was a distinction between the arts and humanities and the social sciences. Their work was shoehorned into international relations methodologies, with modelling, quantitative approaches, and, above all, monocausal theories — “show me *one* ‘independent variable’ in war” as Michael Howard used to say — and they were made to write in jargon-laden, impenetrable prose.

Perhaps we will find, looking back in some years, that Sir Michael Howard’s death marks the passing of the understanding that we are part of eternal change not of unchanging mechanisms. And it may mark the passing of the use of lucid, jargon-free, universally intelligible prose in strategic studies that practitioners can immediately understand without themselves having to read about arcane international relations theories.

Beatrice Heuser holds her D.Phil. from the University of Oxford and a higher doctorate (Habilitation) from the University of Marburg. She has held chairs in international relations and strategic studies at King’s College London, and the universities of Reading and Glasgow, and has been visiting professor at several universities in Paris. She has worked briefly in NATO and continues to seek engagement with practitioners on subjects such as nuclear strategy and military exercises. She has published widely on strategy — e.g., Reading Clausewitz (Pimlico: 2002), The Evolution of Strategy (Cambridge: 2010), Strategy Before Clausewitz (Routledge: 2017) — on nuclear strategy, and on asymmetric warfare. She would like to thank Professors Robert O’Neill and Margaret Macmillan for their very helpful comments; all mistakes and opinions are only her own.



2. The Relevance of Sir Michael Howard’s Harmon Memorial Lecture

By Margaret C. Martin

Each year at the U.S. Air Force Academy, an eminent historian delivers the Harmon Memorial Lecture in military history. In 1967, as the war in Vietnam fully captured the nation’s attention — and shifted from a Washington-centered policy exercise to a contentious social issue that derailed President Lyndon B. Johnson’s social welfare agenda — Michael Howard arrived on campus to deliver the ninth Harmon Memorial Lecture, entitled “Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare.” At that time, Howard was an award-winning historian, which no doubt made him a prime candidate for invitation. His serendipitous presence at Stanford probably made travel planning a little easier too. Howard’s lecture, alongside other notable lectures given by thinkers such as Edward M. Coffman, Peter Paret, I.B. Holley, and Russell F. Weigley, to name a few, demonstrates the success the academy had in its endeavor to elevate an appreciation for history among cadets. Howard’s topic — an examination of the intersection of strategy and policy in the 20th century — complements the goal of the lecture series, the longest running at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

From its inception, the Harmon Lecture, which honors the U.S. Air Force Academy’s first superintendent, Lt. Gen. Hubert R. Harmon, had two goals: “to further encourage the awakened interest in military history that evolved after World War II and to stimulate cadets to develop a lifelong interest in the history of the military profession.”²⁰ This last fall, the academy hosted its 62nd Harmon Lecture, with both an audience and goals that have remained largely unchanged. Our cadets benefit from an education that is broad, in the form of a robust core curriculum, and deep, in the form of the coursework of their academic major. The Harmon Lecture adds to those experiences by putting world-class historians in front of our cadets, driving home the centrality of history to military thought and strategy.

²⁰ Harry R. Borowski, ed., *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, 1959-1987: a Collection of the First Thirty Harmon Lectures Given at the United States Air Force Academy* (Office of Air Force History, 1988), vii.

That Howard's lecture, given over 50 years ago, speaks to a contemporary audience provides evidence of the enduring value of the series. And, given the audience, it is easy to imagine that its themes resonated with the cadets who were on the verge of serving in the war. Although the audience in 1967 may have honed in on Howard's comments about Vietnam in particular, with hindsight we can appreciate the lecture as evidence of Howard as a forward-thinking historian able to wrestle with the great issues facing military leaders. To have this as one of the earliest offerings in a lecture series now more than 60 years running set a high bar early on, to the benefit of our cadets and our academy.

Understanding War and Peace

Howard's lecture revolved around two intertwining themes. The first theme appears obvious initially, but in truth its profundity should give any theorist or historian pause. Military history practiced as an examination of tactics and operations independent or isolated from other factors may be interesting, but it does not take advantage of the benefit of studying the causes and effects of war. Only when war is considered alongside and within the diplomatic, social, political, intellectual, and economic context that surrounds it, does military history have meaningful explanatory power. Howard's insistence that this was the proper way to study military history set the gold standard of the discipline today.

By adhering to that perspective, Howard presented an analysis of the evolution of warfare — his second theme — which accounted for far more than just new weapons or military genius. In his assessment of the 16th and 17th centuries, Howard described military operations as part of a “complicated international bargaining process,”²¹ one of many pressures that affected contests between states. Beginning with Napoleon, warfare took on a different significance: Armies of unprecedented size, deployed and controlled by a single commander, could determine the outcome of a war in a single encounter. States rose and fell at times based purely on the result of a single battle because of the size of the armies and the national investment involved in their employment. In the wake of Napoleonic warfare, many theorists privileged military operations — the decisive battle — over other

²¹ Michael Howard, “Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare,” in *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, 1959-1987*, 348.

factors, including diplomacy, economics, and society, which had informed the use of force in earlier centuries. Howard characterized this belief that warfare was something independent of political and social factors as war as the “interruption of political discourse.”²² While many post-Napoleonic military theorists may have embraced this perspective, others, such as Clausewitz, continued to struggle with the intersection of politics and warfare. In that vein, Howard’s examination of 20th-century warfare is not only a corrective to this “decisive battle” perspective, but it is also the launching point for his insights into the relationship between history and strategy.

Howard reminds us that even as states clung to the notion of the decisive battle, political, social, and industrial development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries made the likelihood of such a decisive military event lower than ever. Technological changes such as the railroad and telegraph linked field commanders to seemingly endless supplies and to their political center. Victory over an opponent’s army no longer guaranteed the end of a conflict, so long as national morale remained high and resources remained available. War was a “matter of competing economic resources, social stability, and popular morale,”²³ with World War I and World War II providing the most devastating and costly examples of the intersection of those factors. If no amount of technological, doctrinal, or tactical innovation on the battlefield could overcome “national health” to bring victory, what does that mean for strategic thinking?

Here, Howard invokes Clausewitz in his framework for good strategic thought. If war is an extension of politics by other means, then countries waging war must necessarily think about the nature of the peace they desire as well. A clear understanding of the desired outcome, as well as a clear sense of what a state is willing to bring to bear to achieve that outcome, underpins successful military strategy. This may seem simple, but simple things are not always easy. The realistic appraisal of factors such as national interest, public support, economic and social stability, and technological advantages — never mind what those factors looked like from the opponent’s perspective — provide the context for what makes each military contest unique. History may be able to open strategists’ eyes to

²² Howard, “Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare,” 349.

²³ Howard, “Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare,” 351.

patterns of warfare and the types of questions they should ask when facing war, but history cannot provide the finer details that change over time, sometimes even during the course of a war.

In the Shadow of Vietnam

When Howard arrived at the U.S. Air Force Academy to deliver his address, he did so against the backdrop of the Johnson administration's escalation of the Vietnam War. Johnson had been president for nearly four years in 1967. In his first 18 months, he oversaw the U.S. policy shift from "limited commitment to assist the South Vietnamese government into an open-ended commitment to preserve an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam."²⁴ Expanded authorities followed the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the first of two sustained air campaigns, Rolling Thunder. Air power was supposed to incentivize the South Vietnamese government to reform and stabilize. The government's inability to do so caused the United States to increase its troop presence, first to protect air bases and then to move into ground operations. As the South Vietnamese failed to maintain a stable government and their modest military power evaporated, Johnson had few options other than to increase the use of American military force. Unable and unwilling to accept a communist South Vietnam, Johnson ramped up America's presence in the country during a period characterized as the "Americanization" of the war. However, that escalation met with increased domestic and international criticism of the war and calls for peace.

By 1967, it had become clearer that the United States could not win with military power alone, and because of a weak South Vietnamese government, Johnson did not see a negotiated peace as an option. Domestically, the antiwar movement had become more vocal and active and by August 1967, public approval of Johnson's handling of the war was an abysmal 28 percent.²⁵ Howard took the stage to address a group of cadets whose emerging future selves would be placed in this conflict, one where air power retained its central importance to the American strategic plan. I imagine his comments on the warp and weft of

²⁴ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1986), 108.

²⁵ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 174.

history and its relation to strategy must have resonated with his audience. As he walked them through the patterns of historical military action and tied them to the ongoing conflict in Vietnam, his optimism for American success surely must have been comforting to those in the audience.²⁶

And to some extent, one can see where his optimism was warranted. In May 1967, when Howard delivered the lecture, there were cracks in the American strategic plan and in its social fabric, but not to the extent that would emerge after the Tet Offensive in 1968. In May, the worst years of American social upheaval on the home front and the administration's palpable "credibility gap" were still on the horizon.²⁷ What prevailed instead were notions of technological and numerical superiority and a commitment to challenging communist pressures. Had Howard had the years of retrospect typically afforded to historical study, he might have seen the disconnect between the measures of success promulgated by the Johnson administration — body count — and the message heard by those college-aged Americans who saw themselves in those numbers. It was that social unrest, fueled in part by objection to the apparent hypocrisy of American foreign policy denying freedom of self-determination for both its ostensible allies and the North Vietnamese challengers that unraveled the American strategic position.

Howard's illumination of U.S. strategic objectives — to help the South Vietnamese government establish the legitimacy it needed to enforce a lasting peace and to persuade the government of North Vietnam to cease interfering in the south — were straightforward and sound. What he could not see, and should not have been expected to see at that point in time, was the far-reaching impact of the American social movements that animated opposition to the war. Clausewitz would remind us that it is the politicians and strategists who must pay constant attention to acceptable terms of peace and the necessary linkage between strategic goals and tactical action. To that end, they must pay attention to the social and political factors that animate the home front in formulating any plan. That the United States failed in that endeavor, certainly from 1968 onward, does not indicate flaws

²⁶ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 126–74. The summary of events in Vietnam draws heavily from chapters 4 and 5 of Herring's work.

²⁷ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 175.

with Howard's theoretical formulation regarding the intertwined nature of strategy and history. Rather, it is a reminder of the need to look at each military conflict, both historical and contemporary, with appreciation of the contextual differences that underscore each.

Although Howard ends his lecture with a shortsighted analysis of the next phase of what would prove to be a bitter American strategic setback in Vietnam, his return to the central question of what conditions indicate that military force is appropriate for achieving a lasting and stable peace is no less powerful. His insistence that to understand success in military conflict, historians and strategists must consider more than operational factors is no less true in the 21st century than it was in the 20th. The most difficult decisions — those made by state leaders to apply military force in the service of a national interest — must include the consideration of factors such as public morale, economic security, and technological superiority, whether in Afghanistan in 2001 or in Vietnam in 1967. Moreover, those same questions and considerations remain valid even as states look to new domains in which to wage war — cyber and space — and new technologies that will redefine military power, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, drone technology, and hypersonic technology, to name a few. New domains and new technology may change where and how nations fight, but the underlying truths of this lecture, such as the inextricable link between ends, ways, and means as well as definitions of success coupled with the grand strategy to get there, remain unchanged.

Because Howard's lecture has continued relevance to how strategists should think about history and the enduring relationship between war-making and peace, it stands out as an exemplar lecture, having achieved the goals laid out by the Air Force senior leaders who inaugurated the Harmon Memorial Lecture series over 60 years ago. His ability to explain the changes in strategic thinking over time should reinforce the importance of military history, broadly construed, and ought to resonate with any young man or woman on the cusp of military service. Military history is the natural archive of a strategist. Those who couple history with the unique context and complexity of a specific emerging conflict are most likely to balance successfully ends, ways, and means. That Howard could make his remarks to an audience full of young men on the verge of joining military service while their nation was at war makes it all the more poignant. It is a shining example of what we would hope for from a lecture, relevant in the moment and in its enduring value, and we are proud

to have it represent the collective efforts of the U.S. Air Force Academy to train and inspire young men and women in service to the Air Force and the nation.

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3. Michael Howard and Military Politics

By Thomas Crosbie

A little more than 50 years ago, Michael Howard delivered the Harmon Memorial Lecture to the department of history at the U.S. Air Force Academy.²⁸ This lecture series was then, and remains today, a noteworthy professional achievement, and as we gather in this roundtable to consider Howard’s comments, one can’t help but marvel at the long and distinguished career we have before us. The Michael Howard of 1967 was, at only 45, already an established figure on both sides of the Atlantic, but he was not yet the legendary figure he would become. To look anew at this lecture, we must summon a vision of this younger Howard, recognizing what he had already achieved, what he was grappling with in his work, and how he chose to guide this particular audience to think critically about their own moment in time. In doing so, we not only honor the work of this remarkable member of our profession, but, I will argue, we can refine our thinking about the most challenging aspect of 21st-century warfare: the deepening entanglement of military and political matters.

Understanding the Time and Place of the Lecture

Howard titled his lecture “Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare,” but I suspect few in the audience would have been able to guess quite what he intended with this phrasing.²⁹ He was speaking to Air Force cadets, the history department faculty, and invited

²⁸ Michael Howard, “Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare,” *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History*, no. 9 (Colorado Springs: United States Air Force Academy, 1967).

²⁹ Good neo-Clausewitzians today will immediately lock onto Howard’s choice of “policy” in the title, since it was Howard himself (with his student Peter Paret) who, in 1976, influentially translated Clausewitz’s famous dictum *Der Krieg ist eine blosse Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln* as “war is a continuation of policy by other means.” The choice of “policy” over “politics” has been the subject of extensive criticism by subsequent scholars. The most accepted interpretation of why Howard and Paret chose “policy” seems be that they wanted to avoid the negative connotations of “politics.” If that reasoning holds, then we should likewise assume that this lecture had a deliberately innocuous title, one that studiously avoided overtures of partisan squabbling. See, Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); George Dimitriu, “Clausewitz and the Politics of War: A Contemporary Theory,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2018): 1–41; Jan Willem Honig, “Clausewitz’s On War: Problems of Text

guests at the end of the department's first symposium on military history. It must be recalled that lecturing to a military academy in 1967 was a politically fraught affair. Teach-ins, sit-ins, and other forms of protest against the Vietnam War had swept across American campuses two years prior, early signs of a generational wedge that would divide the military and the academy.³⁰

The organizers of the symposium would certainly have recognized the dangers in choosing the wrong speaker. A powerful voice speaking against the war might undermine the confidence of these cadets preparing to deploy and stir up simmering tensions among the faculty. Howard, not being American or an expert in American affairs, must have seemed to be a safe choice. Of course, he had the right qualifications. His celebrated volume *The Franco-Prussian War* clearly marked him as a leading historian (on an appealingly remote topic), while his earlier volume, *Disengagement in Europe*, marked him as an anti-communist who foregrounded the role of the military in deterring Soviet Bloc aggression in Europe.³¹ It seems likely that Howard's role in supporting the growth of British military education would have further validated him as a trustworthy figure to speak to the cadets, someone unlikely to wade into the debate of the moment.

From our current vantage point, Howard is probably not the person you would want to give a pep-talk to junior officers about to be deployed to lead unhappy conscripts in a war without an effective strategy. We now know that Howard's histories, no matter how remote they were in time, took their vitality from his keen understanding of the contemporary world.³² He was no antiquarian. While *The Franco-Prussian War* dealt with a conflict far removed from the proxy wars of the Cold War, its concluding chapter dwelt upon the

and Translation," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 57–73; and Youri Cormier, *War as Paradox: Clausewitz and Hegel on Fighting Doctrines and Ethics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016).

³⁰ Marshall Sahlins, "The Teach-Ins: Anti-War Protest in the Old Stoned Age," *Anthropology Today* 25, no. 1 (February 2009): 3–5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20528196>.

³¹ Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd., 1961); Michael Howard, *Disengagement in Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958).

³² As argued by, for example, David Curtis Skaggs, "Michael Howard and the Dimensions of Military History," *Military Affairs* 49, no. 4 (1985): 179–83, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1987538>.

challenges of peacemaking in ways that Howard would connect to the present moment in his 1967 lecture.

Beyond a general desire to link his studies of military history to the questions of the day, Howard, at this time, had already had occasion to grapple with American civil-military affairs. It is clear that by 1967 he gave little credence to the long-standing myth that officers could escape politics. We can glean something more of his thinking at this early phase of his career from the book *Soldiers and Governments*, which he edited.³³ Featuring a long introduction by Howard, the volume brought together experts on the civil-military relations of several countries, including a chapter by famed Americanist D.W. Brogan.³⁴ A keen reader of Howard would have arrived at the symposium with some sense that he viewed military history as something more than the *who*, *what*, and *when* of military campaigns, and specifically that he was part of a movement of scholars who saw militaries as dynamic elements of their broader political environments — and regretted the tendency to view wars as the business of military professionals alone.

Howard's audience would have been primed to listen carefully to what he had to say: This was a chance to hear a respected British historian talk about modern militaries, someone without a dog in the fight regarding Vietnam but who was nevertheless at the cutting edge of the profession. For his part, here was an audience of future officers who were starting their careers in an exceptionally fraught period of American civil-military relations, facing a conflict that exemplified the political complexity of 20th-century war. Connecting to the young officers in the room must have struck Howard as a challenge worth pursuing. These were the very people whom he most needed to heed his warnings regarding the limits of military power.

³³ Michael Howard, ed., *Soldiers and Governments: Nine Studies in Civil-Military Relations* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1957).

³⁴ Incidentally, Brogan, writing in 1957, expressed a similar dissatisfaction as Howard with respect to the amount of research on military affairs within his own field, political science. In a piece published in the widely read *Harper's Magazine*, Brogan lamented, "Willy-nilly, the United States is a great armed power in which the role of the professional soldier is of the first importance and it is a role that has been neglected, for example, by political scientists like myself ... the transformation of an America nominally at peace into one of the world's two great military powers is perhaps the single greatest and most ambiguous change in America." Quoted in Anthony K. Wermuth, "The Army's People in Changing Times," *Military Review* 40 (1969): 20.

The Military as Political Institution

Howard began his talk with typical humility, effacing his own claims to expertise in an effort to historicize military history and the work of military historians. Just as we have stepped back 50 years to meet Howard, he invited his audience back 50 years to consider military history as it was in the “bad old days.” He criticized an older generation of military historians who “moved in a closed, orderly hierarchical society with inflexible standards.” Worst of all, they had no interest in analyzing the politics of why soldiers fight the wars they fight. This old-fashioned separation of politics and military affairs was unquestionably “unhealthy” in Howard’s view, and he credited Quincy Wright and Edward Mead Earle, among others, with finally leading military history out of its seclusion into a full and thoughtful engagement with social and political realities.

Howard begins his story in the Middle Ages, where he argues that the political role of the military was self-evident since sovereigns, fielding small and temporary military forces, were only ever able to wage limited wars. The military instrument was balanced against economic, diplomatic, and political means. In the late 18th century, Napoleon’s *levée en masse* inaugurated an era of large militaries sufficiently powerful that they could disrupt and even destroy opposing political orders through the use of force alone. At this time, military historians began to pick up the bad habit of focusing on the personalities of senior officers and the materiel and tactics of fielded units, to the exclusion of all else. Historians who were not primarily interested in conflict turned their backs on the hermetic world of militaries and discussed any topic other than international conflict. Soldiers and statesmen were influenced by the historians and came to accept the preeminence of militaries in advancing the interests of the state. Thus, in Howard’s view, the bad variety of military history that ignores politics was a reflection of its era, but it also had a reinforcing effect, helping to bring about the very reality it described.³⁵

This Napoleonic inheritance is doubly toxic. Epistemologically, we blind ourselves to the political character of military force by segregating knowledge of the military in specialist

³⁵ Howard, “Strategy and Policy.” Page 4 especially stresses this point.

subgroups. Howard explicitly draws a parallel here between knowledge of how to wage war, which is monopolized by military professionals, and historical knowledge about wars, which is monopolized by the bad type of military historians. Ontologically, having inherited the knowledge of how, under the right circumstances, powerful militaries can shape the geopolitical landscape, we have grown accustomed to wars being resolved through military processes alone, rather than through political processes. With this understanding, post-Napoleonic great powers have outsized militaries that view themselves as separate from other elements of statecraft. They hold out the promise to sovereigns that they can solve geopolitical problems while consequently distorting our understanding of what a viable solution to a conflict would look like.

The great fear that Howard clearly communicates to this audience of cadets and instructors is that the post-Napoleonic line of reasoning leads to wars of attrition and to quagmires without room for political resolution. To win, according to the post-Napoleonic strategists, one must destroy one's enemy, utterly.³⁶ But this, Howard reminds us, is not the path to peace.³⁷

What, in its historical and sociological context, was this dense, nuanced lecture really all about? As I see it, Howard recognized that the officers in the room were being taught to think wrongly about how wars are won and how peace is achieved. His goal was to redirect their thinking: to make them aware that military solutions must be subordinated to alternative forms of national power, and furthermore, that officers are the ones who must insist upon this subordination. Howard provided his audience with a historiography of the military that demands reflexivity and attention to how wars are understood by *practitioners* as much as by historians.

Howard was demanding, but he was also empowering. The cadets were hearing about themselves: They were heading out to fight a war of attrition against an implacable enemy with an unreliable ally, armed with political guidance unlikely to allow them to end that war. Howard was inviting them to question political guidance and to think seriously about how

³⁶ Beatrice Heuser, "Victory, Peace, and Justice: The Neglected Trinity," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 69 (April 2013): 6–12, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-69/JFQ-69_6-12_Heuser.pdf.

³⁷ Howard, "Strategy and Policy," 9.

the military instrument should be balanced against other instruments of national power. In doing so, I contend, they were invited to break out of the role of apolitical professional to which Samuel P. Huntington, in his 1957 classic *The Soldier and the State* (borrowing all the worst habits of the old-fashioned military history), had recently consigned them.³⁸

Fifty Years Since

Fifty years later, we ought to take the time to think through whether the trends Howard described continued along the path he indicated. Let's begin with Howard's emancipatory historiography, his optimistic sense that the bad habits confronted by Wright and Earle had been swept away. The first thing to note is that military history of the sort Howard criticized has persisted, although this actually aligns with his prediction. Painstakingly detailed operational histories of Vietnam (not to mention Grenada, Panama, the Falklands, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan ... and Iraq again) have been written and, through agencies such as the U.S. Center for Military History, will continue to be written. In 1967, Howard was describing a fairly new trend in academic history that placed operational nuance in meaningful dialogue with social and political context. On the academic side, at least, we can see today that this trend has indeed continued and given us quite remarkable academic histories of major conflicts. Top rate academic studies of war are today readily available. For example, answering Howard's particular request, William S. Turley's *The Second Indochina War: A Concise Political and Military History* is as good an example of a comprehensive Vietnam War history as Howard could have wished, one giving equal weight to the struggles of the Vietnamese people as to the military and political decisions of the foreign belligerents.³⁹

There are other significant indicators that historians have followed the path Howard outlined in this lecture. In an influential Society for Military History White Paper, Tami Davis Biddle and Robert M. Citino describe how socially and politically nuanced military history has become the modern core of the field, seemingly fulfilling Howard's century-long

³⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

³⁹ William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Concise Political and Military History*, 2nd ed. (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

historiographic arc.⁴⁰ Howard himself contributed enormously to spreading a slightly different form of this type of military history under the “war studies” banner.⁴¹ Howard’s individual impact now rivals and likely surpasses the impact of those giants he praised in his lecture.⁴²

In 1967, Howard challenged his audience members to be historically reflexive in order to question the policies that constrain military strategy. Howard and Paret in 1976 embedded this particular language into the core of war studies by translating Clausewitz to read “war is a continuation of policy by other means.”⁴³ Appropriately, as his influence has grown in the academy, we have seen a more nuanced understanding of the political and social impact of war on society spread through the historical sciences. At first glance, then, it appears that we have indeed made progress toward an academic history that takes the role of international conflict more seriously.

Strategy and Politics

If Howard’s lecture was a challenge to the cadets, inviting them to embrace a more politically sophisticated form of officership, then we can ask ourselves, did any such evolution in military professionalism come to pass? In other words, if scholars have managed to make strides in placing war and military affairs within a broader socio-political framework, have military professionals likewise evolved their thinking about the socio-political character of their work? This short essay can provide only the briefest sketch of an

⁴⁰ Tami Davis Biddle and Robert M. Citino, “The Role of Military History in the Contemporary Academy,” Society for Military History White Paper (2014).

⁴¹ Brian Holden Reid, “Michael Howard and the Evolution of Modern War Studies,” *Journal of Military History* 73, no. 3 (July 2009): 869–904, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.0.0336>; Laurence Freedman, “Strategic Studies in Britain and the Cold War’s Last Decade,” chap. 9, in *War, Strategy and History: Essays in Honour of Professor Robert O’Neill*, ed. Daniel Marston and Tamara Leahy (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016).

⁴² Evidence for this modest claim can be found through a simple Google Ngram search, which shows “Michael Howard” virtually switching places with “Quincy Wright” from 1970 to 1990. “Michael Howard” appears today almost exactly as frequently in Google’s digitized books as “Quincy Wright” appeared in his heyday, the mid-1950s. See: <https://tinyurl.com/taphkw9>.

⁴³ Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Howard and Paret.

answer, but it can also tease out another nuance of Howard's thinking that deserves recognition.

As Howard argued in his lecture, historical reflexivity is as essential to military professionals as it is to historians. He warned that military professionals work against their own interests when they seek the primacy of their instrument over the other instruments of national power, simply because a hands-down military victory "is likely to increase the postwar political and economic troubles of the victorious side."⁴⁴ Howard had in mind the devastating cost of rebuilding post-World War II Europe, but modern readers will surely recognize the wisdom of this insight as it relates to Iraq. These are clear cases where strategy should push back against policy, to use Howard's 1967 language.⁴⁵ The question might be rephrased as such: To what degree does American military doctrine accord a role for non-military ways and means to support or supplant military ways and means?

While, admittedly, American doctrinal evolution is by no means a linear or logical process,⁴⁶ some trends are readily apparent. Indeed, it is hard to ignore the many ways in which American military doctrine increasingly acknowledges the need to balance military power against other forms of national influence. Most famously, the U.S. Department of Defense has embedded the linked concepts of DIME and PMESII at the highest levels of its joint doctrine, stating boldly that to effectively wield military force, American leaders must balance diplomatic, informational, and economic actions against military ones, and should simultaneously pursue political, military, economic, social, informational, and infrastructural effects.⁴⁷ At a rhetorical level, at least, the American military has thoroughly

⁴⁴ Howard, "Strategy and Policy," 9.

⁴⁵ We are today saddled with decades' worth of debates and doctrinal accretion around the key concepts of strategy, policy, politics, operations, and so forth. As he writes about strategy and policy in this lecture, "strategy" appears to encompass military decision-making broadly conceived (see, for example, page 4), while "policy" typically remains opaque.

⁴⁶ See, inter alia, Thomas Crosbie, "Getting the Joint Functions Right," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 94 (July 2019): 96-100, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1913080/getting-the-joint-functions-right/>.

⁴⁷ For contemporary references to the DIME (Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic) model of instruments of national power, see, *U.S. Joint Publication 3.0, Operations* (2018), section I-1. References to the

addressed what Howard viewed as “the traditional problem of twentieth century warfare,” namely how to balance military power against other forms of power in order to achieve peace without devastation.⁴⁸

If we look under the hood of military organizations, we see that contemporary militaries are politically engaged in surprisingly multi-faceted ways, far beyond what Howard was suggesting in his lecture. As I have argued elsewhere (inspired in part by Howard’s 1979 essay on social strategy), these collective efforts enable militaries to pursue their own forms of statecraft.⁴⁹ Consider, for example, some of the ways that the U.S. Army shapes its political environment. The past 50 years have seen the growth of no fewer than five separate efforts to achieve domestic political ends. Perhaps the most obvious form of Army political strategizing is legislative liaising in Washington. This is supplemented at the local level (mainly around Army installations) by a second category, community relations, which is overlooked almost entirely by scholars. A third category is the field of command information (formerly called troop information) — the Army’s internal communication program. By regulation, the Army is allowed to inform its troops but can no longer indoctrinate them directly. However, this can be considered a kind of political strategy to the degree that the Army directs efforts to influence soldiers’ voting habits and to use soldiers to effectively proselytize Army interests to their friends and family. Public information, a fourth category, is dedicated to shaping the work of civilian journalists. Finally, the fifth category is marketing and public relations, much of which is contracted out to civilian agencies.

The point is not that the Army surreptitiously embarks upon inappropriate, shadowy political maneuvers, but rather that the Army is constantly engaged in appropriate, overt

PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information and Infrastructure) model of effects can be found in section IV-3.

⁴⁸ This is my gloss on Howard. The text states the problem as “how to persuade the adversary to come to terms without inflicting on him such severe damage as to prejudice all chances of subsequent stability and peace.”

⁴⁹ Thomas Crosbie, “The US Army’s Domestic Strategy, 1945-1965,” *Parameters* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2014/2015): 105-18, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3713.pdf>. See also, Michael Howard, “The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 5 (Summer 1979): 975-86, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1979-06-01/forgotten-dimensions-strategy>.

political behavior across multiple levels, targeting multiple audiences, with the aim of affecting government policy (if often indirectly). Having largely ignored this type of domestic-facing political behavior, scholars have yet to fully conceptualize how political modern militaries really are.

What has become clear to virtually all observers of global conflict in the past decade is that America's adversaries have shifted toward more politically nuanced forms of power expression, blending violent and non-violent means to achieve ends through obfuscating "gray zone" strategies.⁵⁰ Russian and Chinese military developments in particular have been labeled "hybrid" as they appear to blend the military and the political in ways that the West is poorly equipped to address.⁵¹ That the newer Russian and Chinese doctrines appear to have been inspired by NATO's own comprehensive approach — a "dark reflection," in the words of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg — is often downplayed, yet is hard to deny.⁵² The point, of course, is that war is more Howardian — more Clausewitzian — than ever, and modern militaries know it. Clearly, a number of lessons about managing the political environment have taken root in military doctrine. What remains unclear is the effect of this new broad-mindedness on the world.

Michael Howard and the New Military Politics

Military agencies have learned an enormous amount about the political character of war, and yet — here comes the twist — Americans are once again caught in an endless war with apparently no political will or capacity to achieve peace. Thus, 50 years after Howard reassured us that what democracies needed was to better blend the political and the

⁵⁰ See, for example, Joseph L. Votel et al., "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 80 (January 2016): 101–09, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-80/Article/643108/unconventional-warfare-in-the-gray-zone/>.

⁵¹ Howard himself fretted over similar oversights in an influential article in 1979, where he contemplated our adversaries' superior social strategies. See, Howard, "Forgotten Dimensions." The literature on hybrid warfare and hybrid threats is vast. For a useful introduction, see, Bastian Giegerich, "Hybrid Warfare and the Changing Character of Conflict," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 65–72, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326440>.

⁵² Jens Stoltenberg, "Keynote Speech," NATO, Opening of NATO Transformation Seminar, March 25, 2015.

military, we must recognize that despite its best efforts, the American defense establishment, at least, has not yet struck the appropriate military-political balance.

On the one hand, we have come very far from the bad old days of military history and of military practice, when historians and officers were cloistered within institutional walls with little contact with broader social and political realities. Historians and military professionals working today recognize that conflict between states is political and that it is tangled together in a Gordian knot with all other aspects of social and political life.

On the other hand, despite this, we see many examples of the lingering bad habits Howard thought had been excised a century ago by Wright and Earle. For example, the Huntingtonian vision of an apolitical officer corps persists. Most flagrantly, even as American military leaders take over traditionally civilian positions, they disavow having any political role.⁵³ And while political vulnerabilities take center-stage in defense debates, conventional weapon systems and politically muted doctrinal solutions predominate.⁵⁴

Howard is most compelling in this lecture when he reveals the limitations of military power, and particularly so when he invites military thinkers — rather than civilian leaders or academics — to integrate this limiting view of military power into their own work. Viewed in these terms, Howard stands today as a precursor to a new movement emerging in the war studies landscape. Damon Coletta and I have recently called this emerging subfield “military politics.”⁵⁵ Choice of name aside, what is so exciting about this very heterogenous movement is that so many different scholars have been struck by the same recognition: namely that the war studies scholarship has provided only a very modest framework for

⁵³ See, for example, James Mattis’ characteristic disavowal of having occupied a political role while Secretary of Defense. W.J. Hennigan, “James Mattis on Why *Call Sign Chaos* Isn’t a Political Book About the Trump Administration,” *Time*, Sept. 14, 2019, <https://time.com/5677440/james-mattis-call-sign-chaos/>.

⁵⁴ Consider, for example, the lack of political nuance in the two new operational concepts being promoted with the Defense Department: the mysterious Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC) and Multidomain Operations (MDO).

⁵⁵ Damon Coletta and Thomas Crosbie, “The Virtues of Military Politics,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Sept. 12, 2019, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X19871605>.

understanding the ways militaries manage their messy political realities.⁵⁶ Scholars including Risa Brooks, Sharon K. Weiner, William E. Rapp, James Golby, Mara Karlin, Charles D. Allen, and Carsten F. Roennfeldt, among others, have followed precisely the thread that Howard was picking at in this lecture, asking, in effect, how officers should balance their military expertise with their political realities.⁵⁷ This new “military politics” paradigm is distinctive in that it investigates the full spectrum of political (not simply partisan) engagement by military leaders with their domestic environments, and not only with their elected civilian counterparts, as has been the focus of the civil-military relations subfield. In these works, I believe we see yet another fertile offshoot attesting to Howard’s enduring influence on how we think about war.

Cadets and students reading Howard’s 1967 lecture today would likely find much to unsettle their beliefs. Howard invited young officers to think of military force as just one resource available in the grand acts of persuasion and dissuasion that constitute international relations, and warned that the devastating power of modern state-of-the-art weapon systems was precisely what made them dangerous to use. Anyone who has taught

⁵⁶ Readers will recognize that this complaint is not so different from Howard’s criticism of the old-fashioned history or Brogan’s complain about mid-century political science (see footnote 9).

⁵⁷ A review of this emerging field has not yet been written, but see the following for a sense of the major developments: Risa Brooks, “Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, ed. Suzanne Nielsen and Don Snider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2009); Damon Coletta, “Courage in the Service of Virtue: The Case of General Shinseki’s Testimony before the Iraq War,” *Armed Forces and Society* 34, no. 1 (2007): 109–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X07304191>; Sharon K. Weiner, “Military Advice for Political Purpose,” in *Mission Creep: The Militarization of US Foreign Policy*, ed. Gordon Adams and Shoon Murray (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014); Crosbie, “The US Army,” 2014; William E. Rapp, “Civil-Military Relations: The Role of Military Leaders in Strategy Making,” *Parameters* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 2015): 13–26, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3710.pdf>; James Golby and Mara Karlin, “Why ‘Best Military Advice’ is Bad for the Military – and Worse for Civilians,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, Jan. 8, 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/01/best-military-advice-bad-military-worse-civilians/>; Brett D. Weigle and Charles D. Allen, “Keeping David from Bathsheba: The Four-Star General’s Staff as Nathan,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 16, no. 1-2 (2017): 94–113, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570.2017.1357327>; Charles Allen, “Military Officers Need to Be Politically Savvy,” Australian Institute of International Affairs, Aug. 18, 2018, <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/military-officers-need-to-be-politically-savvy/>; Carsten F. Roennfeldt, “Wider Officer Competence: The Importance of Politics and Practical Wisdom,” *Armed Forces and Society* 45, no. 1 (2019): 59–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X17737498>.

officers will recognize the visceral appeal — a sort of *call of the void* — of these weapon systems. It is hard indeed to counter the simplifying promise of force. Our hope for some distant but enduring peace rests in large part with our ability as scholars and educators to foster ever more nuanced and reflexive understandings among practitioners, both in and out of uniform. As the boundaries separating military from civilian and war from peace blur, the challenges of using military force prudently will only increase. But somewhere between endless war and isolationism lies the path we mean to take.

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4. The Pity of War: Last Refuge from ‘War is Fun’ Strategists

By Cathal J. Nolan

“This book is not about heroes ... Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War ... Above all I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the pity.”

–Wilfred Owen

These famous lines were written in 1918 by a young poet at war, Wilfred Owen, during the closing months of the terrible calamity and Great War of his generation.⁵⁸ They might have

⁵⁸ Owen’s words were published posthumously in 1920 in the prelude to his first book of poems, edited by his friend Siegfried Sassoon with assistance from Edith Sitwell, and released under the remarkably yet also suitably humble title *Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920).

been written by a young Michael Howard during the even greater catastrophe and more destructive war fought by his generation barely 20 years later. What did two youths thrust into different world wars have in common? National, class, and cultural sensitivities to be sure, along with a sense of being social outsiders admitted to the insider club. But it is not their class or culture or Britishness that matters. More importantly, they shared an unusually keen insight into the essence of things, an uncommon honesty about private motivations and public lies, and an exceptionally rare sense of the power of beautiful language to communicate far beyond the normal impoverished capacity of words. Above all, after being directly exposed to the savage reality of war, neither was ever again seduced by personal or martial vainglory, or nationalist tripe, or pitiless poetry of the kind that killed tens of millions during the first half of the 20th century and, in different languages and national traditions, continues to kill all around the world today. That is why one became a vivid and terrifying poet of the soldier's experience of war who is evermore widely read a century later, and the other became one of the great military historians of the last century who surely will be read a hundred years from now.

Owen pulled us down into the mud and blood and refused to let us look away or pretend that his war was about national honor, or was manly or glorious or morally worthy of its costs. Howard uplifted our most basic understanding of the ebb and flow of the tides of war, and of deeper ocean currents that are today called "war and society" in syllabus shorthand. Having heard the thunder of war in their own lifetimes, each man turned against war while admitting its essential and continuing place and profound meaning in human affairs. It was Howard's focus on the why of military history, not just the what, when, and how, that distinguished his work and separated it from the bellowing herd. He thereby reshaped the whole project of writing the history of war, tracing it from battlefields and contested oceans and skies back to all the nooks and crannies far behind the lines, where decisions for war are made and war's consequences are lived for decades after the guns fall silent. Until they start again.

An admirable lack of ideology in his own public and academic life also comes through in Howard's writing on war. It is clear, jargon-free, and untrammelled by fashionable theories of the moment. It is instead momentous in its view of war in history and of the larger human story too often deformed and overwritten by war. That is why, in the 1980s, he

understood what more ideological strategic thinkers and international relations theorists did not, and still do not: that we don't leave all old realities behind or enter an altogether new era — a “unipolar moment” or “new world order” or “Revolution in Military Affairs” — every time a major player or older method of violence changes costume on the stage of world conflict, as they all do sooner or later. He understood how interactions between culture and technology were ever changing, in turn forcing military adaptation as complex societies prepared for, then actually waged wars. He was not seduced by claims of evermore narrow and specific (and usually unpersuasive) Revolutions in Military Affairs. He looked instead for long patterns and basic rhythms of war in history. He was not blinded by changes in military capability or doctrine. He also looked to other concerns of the true historian of war: abiding social, cultural, and national hates and habits. He knew that we live always and forever in the middle of history, not at some breathlessly posited beginning or fanciful philosophical end. That sober understanding separated his work from revolutionary ideologues of the hard left, who always want to hurry on to the next change without necessarily preserving the essential foundations of basic law and decency, and from reactionary ideologues on the hard right, who still lament and oppose the last change in the name of some imagined prior golden age. Howard was not just a man of reason. He was a champion of reasonableness.

I read nearly all Howard's books while in graduate school at the University of Toronto in the early 1980s, despite not one being on any syllabus in my international relations courses. Reading lists were instead clogged with impenetrable books on the “cybernetic theory of decision-making” and the like. These were no more than cluttered, extended metaphors disguised as faux scientific laws of behavior said to have advanced our understanding of war and peace beyond historical knowledge, which was blithely and arrogantly dismissed as unrigorous, old-fashioned, and merely “anecdotal.” So I read Hedley Bull and Michael Howard in the evenings, almost as a guilty pleasure. It turned out that I had not read this particular lecture delivered to the U.S. Air Force Academy in May 1967. I was keen to start in, the way I used to feel when *very* young and reading an unknown minor work by a then favored author: J.R.R. Tolkien. That fellow countryman of a poet and a historian, who also went to war as an ardent youth, has far more influence over my students than any historian, even one as great as Howard. Tolkien lost all but one of his school friends when he and they volunteered and left to fight in the same trenches that killed Owen, in a war that dressed the

stage for an even greater calamity that pulled in a future historian 20 years later. Yet not even in his white hairs was Tolkien dismayed by the pity of war. Not the way Wilfred Owen was. Not the way a young Michael Howard was.

Fantasies of War

Tolkien saw drowned faces with open eyes looking up beside the duckboard as he walked behind the frontline at the Somme. He witnessed a lifeless land of rot and clanking metal monsters that tore up nature, where the very air was tinged with poison. He thought it all evil. Years later he wrote about it. He called it Mordor. And yet, he wrote far more fondly (and popularly) of the fellowship that the lucky meet at war and cherish ever after, if they survive. As I matured I came to see that, unlike Owen's or Howard's personal encounters with combat, Tolkien's was an experience of war leading to an opportunity missed. His books are filled with regret at endless war, yet they encourage renewed celebration of the glory of war rather than understanding of the pity of war. Huge audiences revel in imagined clashes of arms and battle, are seduced once more by high martial ideals and virtues, and are introduced to a presumed natural leadership of men with swords. They fail to notice that even his best armies never take prisoners. Or that the evil enemy has no women or children, making it far easier to cheer mass slaughter of all his males. Even after experiencing the pity of modern industrial war, Tolkien — an early medievalist by training and temperament — believed in myths of chivalry and knightly virtues. He believed in war as heroic poetry, with just a garnish of pity. He still believed the old lie.⁵⁹ Tolkien did not believe in war as, at best, always evil yet sometimes necessary even so. He thought of war as a positive good wherein a hidden, ultimately divine, purpose guides armies waging forever wars of clouded good versus clearer evil.

We might wonder how so old-fashioned an epic could be published to such acclaim a few decades after World War I and just after World War II, even as the Algerian War and a half dozen other brutal “wars of national liberation” were underway, and while the Vietnam

⁵⁹ “My friend, you would not tell with such high zest to children ardent for some desperate glory, the old lie: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*” Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*, *Poems* (New York: Viking, 1921).

Wars were still escalating. How could it captivate, even enrapture, successive generations who really have no excuse for not seeing war for what it truly is? Yes, there is power in its folk myth and reshaped cultural memories, in its poetical and musical language, in its epic literary imagination. But that's not it. That does not explain why, as we wage 21st-century wars that are decades long and have no end in sight, we have major universities with appointments of "Lecturers in Fantasy," graduate degrees offered in "Tolkien scholarship," and an annual academic journal entitled *Tolkien Studies*. Or breathless books by a who's who of leading strategic studies scholars with titles like *Winning Westeros: How Game of Thrones Explains Modern Military Conflict*, and *Strategy Strikes Back: How Star Wars Explains Modern Military Conflict*.⁶⁰ These books should be shelved as parallels to the distorted 19th-century genre of "battles that changed the world," or maybe even pre-World War I war stories for boys.⁶¹ It is morally obscene, or at best tragicomic, that a respected American general wrote a cover blurb endorsing essays with titles such as "Arya Stark's Targeted Killings and Strategic Decision-Making," "Mother of Dragons: Defiant Leadership for Uncertain Times," and "White Walkers and the Nature of War," asserting that they "make understanding military history and strategy accessible and fun."⁶² Because, of course, one *should* make war accessible and fun for all. In 2019 another American general endorsed a shallow and pretentious book proposing "new rules of war," claiming to provide a philosopher's stone to transmute stagnant forever wars and deliver victory "against Russia, China, and other threats."⁶³

⁶⁰ Max Brooks et al., eds., *Winning Westeros: How Game of Thrones Explains Modern Military Conflict* (New York: Potomac Books, 2019); and Max Brooks et al., *Strategy Strikes Back: How Star Wars Explains Modern Military Conflict* (New York: Potomac Books, 2018).

⁶¹ Edward Creasy, *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World: From Marathon to Waterloo* (London: Bentley, 1851); Nugent Robinson, *A History of the World with All its Great Sensations*, 2 vols. (New York: Collier, 1887). More familiar to modern students are, J. F. C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World*, 3 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1954-1956); and Fletcher Pratt, *Battles that Changed History* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1956). On "war stories for boys" see, for example, D. M. Kelsey, ed., *Deeds of Daring by the American Soldier, North and South*, rev. edition (New York: Saalfield, 1903).

⁶² Lt. General H. R. McMaster, former national security adviser, quoted on the back cover of *Winning Westeros*.

⁶³ "As an American, I loathe seeing our national honor tarnished by low-level enemies ... People who claim they know how to win future wars are usually wrong. This book is different." Sean Mcfate, *The New Rules of War: How America Can Win — Against Russia, China, and Other Threats* (New York: William Morrow,

In the 1950s, Akira Kurosawa avoided the then-taboo subject of the Japanese army waging vicious war in China and the Pacific to deliver an older, more honorable, and more acceptable portrait of the Japanese making virtuous war in the samurai era. I think we are seeing the same thing today in all the great power capitals. I do not think it is an accident that contemporary strategic studies parallels the three most important popular cultural depictions of war since the 20th century's descent into total war. Nor is it an accident that all three are faux-medieval epics: *Star Wars*, *Game of Thrones*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. And they *are* important, because they are internationally and generationally influential as deep distortions of what war is, and threatens to become. These highly profitable epics are supporting legs of a triad of cultural longing that is as intense as Kurosawa's desire to restore the "joy of battle." They seek to elevate the named hero over the faceless soldier after a joyless era of total war by mass conscript armies and strategic bombers. Coming out of two world wars full of atrocities, as all major militaries moved from slaughtering each other's armed youth in uniform in World War I to targeting "enemy civilians" in World War II and afterward, we meet fantasies of immense wars that are nonetheless decided by champions of virtue. On the page and screen, mass armies clash in colossal battles and genocide is routine practice, yet it is individuals fighting with swords (special forces?) who dominate the imagined moral and combat universes. Having survived the wars of the 20th century we understand that we can never do that again. But we want to. War is terrible, yet it seems that we love it too much to give it up.

I don't agree with everything Howard said in his 1967 lecture. But nowhere in any of his writing is there even a hint of this cultural fantasy that is also creeping into policy papers and arguments. For it *is* mere fantasy that, living as we must in the messy middle of history, we might somehow escape from history. The arc of expansion of war that began as early as the 14th century forces us to acknowledge that the destination of military history was the 20th century's total wars. Seventy-five years later, we despise what history showed us more than we really remember or fear it. We want to turn away again. We want to return to fighting that is intimate, full of warrior values and moral virtues, of victory and defeat and not just annihilation. We seek a return to some form of "limited war," redefined by new

2019). Endorsements by Gen. (Ret.) Stanley McChrystal and Sir Richard Dearlove, former director of MI6, amount to more crude hubris.

strategic and operational escalation theories of precision bombing, targeted killing, and nation-building rather than nation-wrecking counter-insurgency. Never mind that these ideas are leading us into endless wars and covering up our obliteration of many other laws of war, tattering what few restraints there are as we destroy some village or valley in order to save it. Let the drones and smart missiles fly. Never mind that as they fly over ancient borders in acts of *force majeure* they further abrade the already worn thin ideal of muted restraint in a world of sovereign states, a kind of armed reasonableness now set aside as too quaint. Or just in the way.

This appears to be a global phenomenon, not culturally specific to Americans or Western societies. Why? Generations that fought old wars fade and die and follow-on generations forget, eroding the main support of what peace there is: direct memory of the horrors and moral calamity of war. The last war fades to gray until it seems bookish, no matter what historians say or write in a mostly vain effort to keep memories alive and vivid. New generations march behind leaders who themselves never experienced war and think they might like to try it. Or who did fight and lost, and now want vengeance for the humiliations and defeats of their youth. New technologies of violence are heavily funded across years and decades of always tentative peace, with promises of Revolutions in Military Affairs that will change the nature of war but don't. In much the same way, panzers promised to break the stalemate of total war in the trenches but didn't. For a short time, they only seemed to. Once defenders were no longer surprised by deep armored thrusts and learned to respond with mines, artillery, and tank buster planes, once Allied armies deployed in a strategic defense in depth and overwhelming quantities, the panzers bogged down. Along with German ambition to *Weltmacht*, they were systematically destroyed in an even larger industrial war in which accelerated rates of attrition exceeded those of World War I. It has been said before and is now being said again that a Revolution in Military Affairs, or our side's special moral virtue or new strategic thinking, will reshape the face of war. We can tilt the playing table in our favor, make the "iron dice of war" roll sixes only for us. Through war we *can* solve our most irresolvable problems, end feeble decades of geostrategic dilemma, and defeat intractable foes. It is one of the persistent patterns of military history

that new generations succumb to short-war delusions that lead them into long wars of attrition.⁶⁴

False Hopes

Howard's writing had none of these vices of bad poetry and worse martial and short-war fantasies. He presented war the way every military historian should: with analytical rigor about how wars are started and waged, won and lost. He never glorified war in veiled nationalist terms or wrote as if morally or emotionally detached from the suffering and destruction that all war entails. I read his lecture delivered a half century ago with respect for its abiding wisdom and humanistic insight, yet also sadness over what he got wrong as he was caught in the middle of history, as we all are. One can picture him at the podium pleading a lifelong hope for restraint in war to cadets and officers of an air force that, at the direction of civilian leaders and in the name of the society that put them in the air, was escalating the bombing campaign over Vietnam even as he spoke, leading to years of ineffable suffering and futile tragedy.⁶⁵ That day, he said what he wanted them to do in Vietnam, not what they actually did. He was much more clear-eyed about later American wars, so full of piety and pity. More clear-eyed than I was.

We all make mistakes, especially when talking about current affairs, which are mostly clouded, or future conflicts, which are completely veiled. Nevertheless, students, journalists, and public audiences keep asking historians to make predictions. Howard made fewer mistakes of that sort than most of us because he knew that, with a few regional exceptions, the modern state system is much closer to armed anarchy than to perpetual peace. No other endeavor receives even a fraction of the resources or moral effort humanity devotes to making war, to recovering from war, or investment in future wars made over years and even decades of always tentative peace. Howard hoped, as we all might, that one day an ambition for peace among the states would displace the suspended "war of all

⁶⁴ I make this argument in *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Specifically, on the failure of the *panzer* idea, see pages 404–89.

⁶⁵ Michael Howard, "Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare," Harmon Memorial Lecture in Military History, no. 9, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado, 1967, esp. 12.

against all.” Yet, I think that his major error as a historian was to place too much faith in what some now call the “postmodern state”⁶⁶ as a vehicle for rearranging world politics in a way that limits or ends war, so that we might one day arrive at the Kantian “league of peace” and stable international order to which he aspired. I think he underestimated the atavistic urge that abides in modern times, deeply informs the era of states, and marks world affairs past, present, and most likely also to come.

I doubt that the modern (or postmodern) state is, as Howard argued and believed, the last, best hope for humanity, or that anything vital really changed in European history in the 18th century. It is noteworthy that a key figure marching through his book on the Franco-Prussian War,⁶⁷ the narrowly but deeply admired Helmuth von Moltke, rejected the core moral aspiration to peace of his philosopher countryman, Immanuel Kant.⁶⁸ He said instead: “Eternal peace is a dream, and not even a pleasant one. War is a part of God’s world order.”⁶⁹ As French defiance continued inside surrounded and bombarded Paris and gathered pace beyond the capital, the supposedly rational and restrained Moltke lurched toward a solution that was alien to the limited “cabinet war” he had planned: He issued orders to crush all resistance in a “war of extermination.” His intent was total: to destroy all opposition throughout France, then to impose a ruthless *diktat*. When the French still refused to surrender, it was Otto von Bismarck’s turn to display calculated cruelty and indulge the wild escalation that marks most modern wars. He ordered villages burned and demanded reprisal hangings and shootings for the smallest act of resistance, such as boys throwing stones or spitting at Prussian troops. His wife went further in private letters, writing that the Prussians should refuse to discriminate by age or gender. “Shoot and stab all the French,” she advised her husband, “down to the little babies.”⁷⁰ It is not a rational peacemaking capacity of modern states that impresses most. It is their war-making

⁶⁶ Robert Cooper, “The Post-Modern State and the World Order,” *Demos* (2000):7-43.

⁶⁷ Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (New York, Macmillan, 1961).

⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” or *Zum ewigen Frieden: ein philosophischer Entwurf*, 1st ed. (Königsberg: 1795).

⁶⁹ Helmuth von Moltke, “War and Peace,” in *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel Hughes (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995), 22.

⁷⁰ Nolan, *Allure of Battle*, 312-14, quoted at 314.

capability that has been resorted to more frequently in the past, and likely will be called upon again and again in the future.

As we move into the third decade of the 21st century, chronic, indecisive, and seemingly endless wars of a kind that would have been familiar to Louis XIV and to overconfident Enlightenment *philosophes* remain the normal state of affairs. Contrary to Howard's hope that humanity has advanced beyond organizational primitivism, it must be pointed out that it was the modern state and its vastly enhanced capacity to mobilize immense technological, economic, human, and moral resources that first made total war a possibility and then a 20th-century reality. It was the states that enabled national, cultural, religious, and ideological vanities to manifest as the first mass armies, sustained opposing trench systems, and then built fleets of strategic bombers. The same capacities and vanities keep intercontinental ballistic missiles waiting in silent silos and hidden submarines as you read this. As we whistle past graveyards of the best laid plans of idealists and diplomats, the history of war almost whistles back, reminding us that war underlies the deepest patterns of world history that are carved by vanity and error, more even than by arrogance or ambition or calculation. What marks all eras are issues of international stability and order in the face of an ancient yet abiding urge to make war.

Those of us privileged to write about the history of war are obligated to approach the topic mostly as Howard did, although we should avoid Clausewitzian substitution of idolatry of "military genius" for the Enlightenment's comparable idolatry of military geometry. It is not enough to record memoranda of the intent of decision-makers and the operational history of a campaign or debate weapon systems and tactics or command decisions. We should dig deeper, as he did, into the loam of moral and physical engagement by ordinary men and women caught up in the most extraordinary events of their lives. We ought to write without falsehoods that hide the brutality of war behind a favored flag or claimed moral mission, and without chauvinist favor to any one nation's uplifted heroes, proclaimed causes, or self-serving martial myths. We should abjure writing that downplays savagery yet avoid ahistorical ideological claims to a superior tradition of Western warfare that is supposedly uniquely virtuous. We ought not write bad histories warped by cruel cultural smugness,

wrapped in paeans to special virtues our enemies cannot possibly share.⁷¹ The true tale of war is uglier, more complex, and far more important than any one nation's cause or delusions. In that sense, military history is much too important to be left to historians.

We ought to also critique studies of war in other disciplines that look for final solutions to eternal problems. We should remind readers that history suggests that there are quite a few problems that have no solutions. That we must deal with the “bent twig” of modern nationalism, as Isaiah Berlin once put it, riffing off Kant's 1784 assertion that “out of the crooked timbre of Humanity, no straight thing was ever made.”⁷² We should remember, when asked to say what lessons history has for the present or future, that history teaches so very many lessons it is nearly impossible to know which ones apply. That is why so many military reform projects and state-building efforts that start in rational idealism end in organic failures. Political architecture built on a bad foundation cannot stand once American or NATO or other foreign troops are pulled away, as one suspects Russia, China, and India will also soon learn. It is why a fundamentally pragmatic and problem-solving profession like the modern military consistently fails to absorb the deep lessons about the application of force that Howard taught. Yet, it is also why so many soldiers turn to military history after they retire and begin to gray, to discover more profound truths about what they did or failed to achieve with so much effort, and too often, so very much blood.

It was Howard's special bequest that he taught us how to analyze warfare neutrally, yet without losing sight of the profound pity of war. He also understood that it is unhelpful to write and speak about war, or to propose strategy, using a template of assumed good and evil. He knew that if we succumb to unexamined moral claims we cannot understand the mechanisms of war's evil and the universal pity of war, or why the best laid plans of mice and ministers so often lead to avoidable tragedy.

⁷¹ A false assertion of the prevalence of battle culture, and an ahistorical claim to a linear heritage that stretches from classical warfare to modern times, ignoring a thousand years of dominance of siege warfare, is characteristic of the “Western Way of War” thesis argued by Victor David Hansen. See especially, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

⁷² Isaiah Berlin, “The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism” in Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 253–78.

I was never privileged to meet Michael Howard. Yet, I feel almost that I did, so clear and sharp and incisive were his many essays and books that I read over the years, so full of encounters with his first-rate wit and mind and his overarching moral sensibility. Fortunately, his books remain on my shelves. I shall revisit them often in the future, as I have done in the past. For his writing was of the kind that keeps one reading, thinking, reconsidering, and wishing that one could sit down to dinner with the author and wade into a free-flowing conversation. To replenish at Aswan, in the Nile of his knowledge.

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5. A Great Captain of Military History

By Paul L. Miles

I remember the exact moment when I was introduced to the work of Michael Howard. It was October 1961, and the occasion was a meeting with the Oxford don who supervised my study of modern history. When I mentioned my particular interest in military history, he said that I might find a book written by Michael Howard, one of his former students, interesting. The book was *The Franco-Prussian War*, which had just been published.⁷³

⁷³ Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

To say that I found *The Franco-Prussian War* interesting would be an understatement. Howard's account of what the French call the War of 1870 was so engaging and provocative that I decided to become, admittedly from a distance, a student of this relatively young historian.⁷⁴ I was determined to read everything Howard wrote, a goal that, given his productivity, became increasingly challenging — and daunting.

Michael Howard was a true Renaissance man, a scholar who explored every dimension of war. In what ways did Howard demonstrate his catholic interests and prolific scholarship? I can provide only a representative sampling.

Not surprisingly for someone who collaborated with Peter Paret in translating and editing Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*, much of Howard's work examines the relationship between politics and warfare, particularly the coordination of policy and strategy. Books such as *The Continental Commitment* and *Grand Strategy*, a volume in the United Kingdom's official history of strategy in World War II, and essays such as "Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare" attest to his grasp of this strand of military history.⁷⁵

While Howard and Paret's edition of *On War* can be considered Howard's most important contribution to the study of military thought, it is just one example of scholarship that illuminates the theoretical foundations of strategy. Essays such as "Jomini and the Classical Tradition in Military Thought" and "The Influence of Clausewitz" explicate the roots — and relevance — of traditional strategy. Especially noteworthy is Howard's essay on Jomini, an

⁷⁴ I say "from a distance" because I did not meet Howard until he gave the keynote address for a symposium sponsored by the Department of History at the United States Military Academy in 1982. At that time, Howard was the Regius Professor of History at Oxford.

⁷⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defense Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972); Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy, vol. 4, August 1942-September 1943* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1972); Michael Howard, "Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare," in Howard, *Studies in War and Peace* (New York: Viking, 1971).

incisive critique of Jomini's *Art of War* that restores the Swiss military theorist to his rightful place in the history of military thought.⁷⁶

The fact that Howard's career developed during the nuclear age no doubt accounts for his attention to the role of science and technology, particularly the implications of technological breakthroughs for both military and foreign affairs. As Howard explained in the early 1970s, he had focused during an "intellectual pilgrimage" of the previous 15 years on two lines of inquiry: "the traditional study of military history, and the study of international relations *in the light of nuclear and missile technology*."⁷⁷ One of his earliest essays, "Strategy in the Nuclear Age," which drew on a 1957 lecture for the Royal United Services Institute in London, proved to be a harbinger of commentaries, such as "War and Technology" and "On Fighting a Nuclear War," that explore the "technological dimension of strategy."⁷⁸

And while eschewing as a rule the great man theory of history, Howard did not hesitate to scrutinize the record of military leaders and statesmen who loom large in the history of not only war but also international relations. His essays on personalities as disparate as the Duke of Wellington, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, and Henry Kissinger demonstrate a flair for portraiture. Consider, for instance, Howard's characterization of Kissinger: The former national security adviser and secretary of state "was a historian before he was a statesman, not, like Clarendon or Guizot, a statesman turned historian; so he had an

⁷⁶ Michael Howard, "Jomini and the Classical Tradition in Military Thought," in *The Theory and Practice of War*, ed. Michael Howard (London: Cassell, 1965); Michael Howard, "The Influence of Clausewitz," in Clausewitz, *On War*.

⁷⁷ Quoted on dust jacket of *Studies in War and Peace*.

⁷⁸ Michael Howard, "Strategy in the Nuclear Age," *RUSI Journal* 102, no. 608 (1957): 473-82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071845709423439>; Michael Howard, "War and Technology," *RUSI Journal* 132, no. 4 (1987): 17-22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071848708522802>; Michael Howard, "On Fighting a Nuclear War," in Howard, *The Causes of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). For Howard's formulation of the "technological" and other dimensions, see, Michael Howard "The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 57 (Summer 1979): 975-86, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1979-06-01/forgotten-dimensions-strategy>.

awareness, paralleled only perhaps by that of Churchill, that the events which he was helping to shape might one day be converted into history by himself.”⁷⁹

Howard made comparable contributions to historiography. “The Use and Abuse of History” and “Military History and the History of War” regularly appear on syllabi for graduate courses in the field.⁸⁰ Finally, we should not overlook his gift for synthesis, a talent displayed in *War in European History* and *The First World War*.⁸¹

The Revisionist Work

Laying aside the above aspects of Howard’s corpus, what makes his writings so provocative and consequential is the revisionist perspective he brings to some shopworn issues. Take, for example, his reconsideration of two topics: the making of Allied strategy in World War II and the “cult of the offensive” in World War I.

When Howard published *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* in 1968, explaining disagreement between British and American strategists in terms of opposing “ways of war” prevailed among historians of World War II. According to Maurice Matloff, author of *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, the U.S. Army’s official history of strategy in World War II, the Anglo-American debate over strategy for the war with

⁷⁹ Michael Howard, “Wellington and the British Army,” in Howard, *Studies in War and Peace*; Michael Howard, “Montgomery,” in Howard, *Causes of War*; Michael Howard, “Kissinger,” in Howard, *Causes of War*, 225.

⁸⁰ Michael Howard, “The Use and Abuse of Military History,” *RUSI Journal* 138, no. 1 (1993): 26–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071849308445676>; Michael Howard, “Military History and the History of War,” in *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, ed. Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also, Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

⁸¹ Michael Howard, *War in European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Michael Howard, *The First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Germany reflected a clash between “the principle of opportunism and long-range commitments, between a war of attrition and a war of mass and concentration.”⁸²

Howard was not persuaded. The key to the evolution of Allied strategy, he argued, especially for the Mediterranean theater, was not to be found in the story of striking compromises between a “British Way in Warfare,” characterized by exploitation of sea power and conduct of so-called peripheral operations, and an “American Way of War,” marked by the concentration of ground forces and pursuit of a decisive battle.⁸³ After investigating the context of the decisions that led to the landings in North Africa in 1942 and the invasions of Sicily and Italy in 1943, Howard concluded, “The development of British — and Allied — strategy was a piecemeal affair, in which the military leaders had often simply to do what they could, where they could, with the forces which they had to hand.” In other words, feasibility was a more reliable guide to understanding Allied strategy than strategic doctrine or national ways of war.⁸⁴

Twenty years after reconsidering Allied strategy for the Mediterranean theater in World War II, Howard tackled the significance of the offensive doctrine that underlay war plans of the European powers on the eve of World War I. The 1980s were a time when exploring the implications of the “cult of the offensive,” a belief in the primacy of the offense that bordered on ideology, was popular among both military historians and political scientists.⁸⁵ Excessive faith in the superiority of the offense, they asserted, had precluded European general staffs from coming to grips with advances in weapons technology that enhanced the

⁸² Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1959), 42.

⁸³ Basil H. Liddell Hart popularized the concept of a “British way in warfare” in *The British Way in Warfare* (New York: Macmillan, 1932). For Howard’s critique of the latter, see, “The British Way in Warfare: A Reappraisal,” in Howard, *Causes of War*. On the genesis of the American way of war, see, Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), xx-xxii.

⁸⁴ Michael Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 2.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Stephen Van Evera, “The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War,” *International Security* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984): 58-107, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2538636>; and Jack L. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

power of the defense. In particular, military leaders had failed to learn the “lessons” of the Russo-Japanese War, a conflict that foreshadowed what British theorist J. F. C. Fuller called the “defensive trinity” of bullet, spade, and wire.⁸⁶ The cult of the offensive offered an explanation of not only the outbreak of war in 1914 but also the subsequent prosecution of costly and futile offensives.

Howard brought a revisionist perspective to bear on the topic. In “Men Against Fire,” he acknowledged that the costly offensives undertaken by the belligerents, particularly on the Western Front, had left an image of “strategic and tactical blindness virtually unparalleled in history.” But rather than validating such an image, Howard argued that the military leaders who planned the offensive operations and the political leaders who endorsed the offensives were “neither blind to the likely consequences of their attacks nor ill-informed about the defensive power of twentieth-century weapons.” None of them expected the war could be won without heavy losses.⁸⁷

In developing his line of thought, Howard demonstrated that rather than being indifferent to prewar advances in weapons technology, European general staffs had “exhaustively analyzed” the influence of firepower on tactics. Moreover, regular forces “knew that the best answer to the rifle was a spade.” The level of casualties sustained during the course of the war did not result from rigid adherence to faulty doctrine but from “inefficiency, inexperience, and the sheer organizational problems of combining force and maneuver on the requisite scale.” As he put it when reviewing the French experience, the problem with the French army “was not so much that it was offensively minded as that it was inefficient.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ J. F. C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961: A Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial, and Russian Revolutions on War and Its Conduct* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 163–64.

⁸⁷ Michael Howard, “Men Against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 510.

⁸⁸ Howard, “Men Against Fire,” 526, 523.

Bringing War and Society Together

How, then, should we place Howard's contributions to military history in perspective? One way is to note that his work explored all of the salient dimensions of strategy that he himself highlighted in "The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy," that is, the operational, logistical, social, and technological. Another way, one that resonates in today's academy, is to acknowledge the instrumental role he played in laying the groundwork for the "war and society" school of thought. Whether examining the origins, conduct, or consequences of war, Howard emphasized the force of societal factors. Indeed, as the *Guardian* noted in its obituary of Howard, "The unifying theme of all his work was the placing of military history and strategic thought in the broadest *social* and political context."⁸⁹

"[The historian] has to study war not only . . . in the framework of political history, but in the framework of economic, social, and cultural history as well," declared Howard in 1975. Thirty years later, when he published his memoir *Captain Professor*, he reiterated his philosophy of military history: "The history of war, I came to realize, was more than the operational history of armed forces. It was the study of entire societies. Only by studying their cultures could one come to understand what it was they fought about and why they fought in the way they did."⁹⁰

Along with Howard, other historians who embraced the idea of war and society broadened the concept to include the study of the interaction of society and military institutions not only in war but also in peacetime. But whatever the precise definition, the war and society school, sometimes labeled the "new military history," quickly became, as Robert Citino

⁸⁹ "Sir Michael Howard Obituary," <https://theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/01/sir-michael-howard-obituary>, emphasis added.

⁹⁰ Howard, *War in European History*, x; Michael Howard, *Captain Professor: The Memoirs of Sir Michael Howard* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 145. In one of his last public appearances, a RUSI conference marking the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, Howard stressed the importance of understanding the social — and moral — factors that shaped European society's response to war in 1914. See, Michael Howard "The Great War and the Mentalité of 1914," *RUSI Journal* 159, no. 4 (2014): 14-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2014.949484>.

noted in 2007, “an integral, even dominant, part of the parent field from which it emerged.”⁹¹

Citino and Tami Davis Biddle recently observed that developments in the field have overtaken the phrase “new military history.” It is no longer new. Military historians have for some time seen the field as encompassing “not only the study of military institutions in wartime, but also the study of the relationships between military institutions and the societies that create them; the origins of war, societies at war, and the myriad impacts of war on individuals, groups, states, and regions.”⁹² The fact that military history is now defined in such expansive terms brings additional meaning to the epithet accorded Howard by the *Daily Telegraph*: “doyen of military historians.”⁹³

When I was introduced to the study of military history as a cadet at West Point in the late 1950s, the textbook was *Great Captains Before Napoleon*, a survey of the exploits of Alexander, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, and Frederick the Great. At that time, the study of great captains ranked with the analysis of decisive battles and campaigns as the most popular approach to military history. Sir Michael Howard was, in his own way, a great captain of military history.

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⁹¹ Robert M. Citino, “Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007), 1071, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.112.4.1070>. On the meaning of the “new military history,” see also, John Whiteclay Chambers II, “The New Military History: Myth and Reality,” *Journal of Military History* 55, no. 3 (1991): 395–406; and Joanna Bourke, “New Military History,” in *Modern Military History*, ed. Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2006).

⁹² Tami Davis Biddle and Robert M. Citino “The Role of Military History in the Contemporary Academy,” Society for Military History White Paper, Sept. 27, 2018, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/role-military-history-contemporary-academy>.

⁹³ “Professor Sir Michael Howard, OM, Doyen of Military Historians Who Had Experienced War at First Hand and Won an MC,” *Daily Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2019/12/01/professor-sir-michael-howard-doyen-military-historians-had-experienced/>.

University and Ph.D. from Princeton. During the Vietnam War, he commanded an Army engineer company at Cam Ranh Bay and later served as aide de camp to the chief of staff, U.S. Army, and member of the Joint Military Commission that implemented the military provisions of the Paris Peace Accords. His essays on U.S. military policy and strategy include “Marshall as Grand Strategist,” in George C. Marshall: Servant of the American Nation (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and “Roosevelt and Leahy: The Orchestration of Global Strategy” in FDR and the U.S. Navy (St. Martin’s, 1998).



6. Strategy and Policy in Twentieth-Century Warfare

By Michael Howard

This lecture was given at the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1967 as part of the academy’s Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History.

My pleasure in accepting the very great honour which you have done me in inviting me to be the first foreign scholar to deliver the Harmon Memorial Lecture in Military History was tempered only by the uncertainty which I always feel as to what “military history” is, if indeed it exists at all as an independent category of historical studies, and whether, if it does, I am a military scholar.

Fifty years ago neither in the United States nor in the United Kingdom would anybody have seriously raised the question. Everyone knew what military history was. It was the history of the armed forces and of military operations. Its subject-matter occupied an insulated arena, with little if any political or social context. The military historian, like the military man himself, moved in a closed, orderly hierarchical society with inflexible standards, deep if narrow loyalties, recondite skills and lavish documentation. He chronicled the splendours

and the miseries of man fighting at the behest of authorities and in the service of causes which it was no business of his to analyse or of theirs to question.

This kind of combat and unit history still serves a most valuable function both in training the professional officer and in providing essential raw material for the more general historian. To write it effectively calls for exceptional experience and skills. But it is not surprising that so limited a function attracted very few historians of the first rank. It is more surprising that so many historians of the first rank, for so many years, thought it possible to describe the evolution of society without making any serious study of the part played in it by the incidence of international conflict and the influence of armed forces. So long as military history was regarded as a thing apart, it could not itself creatively develop, and general historical studies remained by that much the poorer. The credit for ending this unhealthy separation was due very largely to scholars of the United States — particularly the group which Professor Quincy Wright collected around him at the University of Chicago and those who gathered under Edward Mead Earle at Princeton. But it [was] due also to the foresight of the United States Armed Services themselves in enlisting, to write and organise their histories of the Second World War, such outstanding scholars as Dr. Kent Greenfield, Dr. Maurice Matloff, Dr. W. Frank Craven and Professor Samuel E. Morison, to name only the leaders in this gigantic enterprise. The work which they produced is likely to rank as one of the great historiographical series in the world, and its influence on military history has been profound. Today, the history of war is generally seen as an intrinsic part of the history of society. The armed forces are studied in the context of the communities to which they belong, on which they react, and so formidable a share of whose budgets they absorb. And their combat activities are considered, not as manoeuvres isolated from their environment as much as those of a football game, but as methods of implementing national policy, to be assessed in the light of the political purpose which they are intended to serve.

The number of wars in modern history in which a narrow study of combat operations can provide a full explanation of the course and the outcome of the conflict is very limited indeed. In Europe from the end of the Middle Ages up till the end of the eighteenth century, the performance of armed forces was so far restricted by difficulties of communications and supply, by the limited capabilities of weapons, by the appalling incidence of sickness, and above all by the exigencies of public finance and administration, that warfare, although

almost continuous as a form of international intercourse, was seldom decisive in its effects. When States tried to support military establishments capable of sustaining a hegemony in Europe, as Spain did in the sixteenth century and as France did in the seventeenth, their undeveloped economies collapsed under the strain. More prudent powers kept their campaigns within limits set by a calculation of their financial capacity. Military operations thus came to be regarded as part of a complicated international bargaining process in which commercial pressures, exchanges of territory, and the conclusion of profitable dynastic marriages were equally important elements. The results of the most successful campaign could be neutralised by the loss of a distant colony, by a court intrigue, by the death of a sovereign, by a well-timed shift in alliances, or by the exhaustion of financial credit. There are few more tedious and less profitable occupations than to study the campaigns of the great European masters of war in isolation — Maurice of Orange, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Montecucculi, Saxe, even Marlborough and Frederick the Great; unless one first understands the diplomatic, the social and the economic context which gives them significance, and to which they contribute a necessary counterpoint. Any serious student of American history knows how widely he must read not only in his own historical studies but in the political and economic history of Britain and of France before he is to understand how and why the United States won its independence, and the part which was played in that struggle by force of arms. A study of the campaigns of Washington, Cornwallis, and Burgoyne really tells us very little.

This was the situation up till the end of the eighteenth century, with the advent of Napoleonic warfare, the situation changed radically. During the last few years in the eighteenth century both political conditions and military techniques developed to such an extent, that now unprecedented proportions of the manpower of the nation could be called up and incorporated into armies of equally unprecedented size. These armies could be controlled and manoeuvred so as to meet in a single battle, or series of battles, which would decisively settle the outcome of the war. With national resources thus concentrated and at the disposal of a single commander, the destiny of the State hung on the skill and judgement with which he deployed his forces during a few vital days. The campaigns of Marengo and Austerlitz, of Jena and Wagram, of Leipzig and Waterloo possessed all the dramatic unities. Forces well matched in size and exactly matched in weapons, operating within rigid boundaries of time and space, could by the skill of their commanders and the

endurance and courage of their troops settle the fate of nations in a matter of hours. Military operations were no longer one part in a complex counter point of international negotiation: they played a dominant solo role, with diplomacy providing only a faint apologetic obligato in the background. There were of course many other factors involved, other than the purely military, in the growth of the Napoleonic Empire and, even more, in its ultimate collapse; but the fact remained that Napoleon had lived by the sword and he perished by the sword. The study of swordsmanship thus acquired a heightened significance in the eyes of posterity.

Nothing that happened in Europe during the next hundred years was to undermine the view that war now meant the interruption of political intercourse and the commitment of national destinies to huge armies whose function it was to seek each other out and clash in brief, sanguinary and decisive battles. At Magenta and Solferino in 1859 the new Kingdom of Italy was established. At Königgrätz in 1866 Prussia asserted her predominance in Germany, and by the battle of Sedan four years later a new German Empire was established which was to exercise a comparable predominance in Europe. Operational histories of these campaigns can be written — indeed they have been written in quite unnecessarily large numbers — which, with little reference to diplomatic, economic, political or social factors, contain in themselves all necessary explanation of what happened and why the war was won. Operational history, therefore, in the nineteenth century, became synonymous with the history of war. It is not surprising that the soldiers and statesmen brought up on works of this kind should in 1914 have expected the new European war to take a similar course: the breach of political intercourse; the rapid mobilization and deployment of resources; a few gigantic battles; and then the troops, vanquished or victorious as the case might be, would be home by Christmas while statesmen redrew the frontiers of their nations to correspond to the new balance of military profit and loss. The experience of the American Civil War where large amateur armies had fought in totally different conditions of terrain, or the Russo-Japanese War which had been conducted by both belligerents at the end of the slenderest lines of communications, seemed irrelevant to warfare conducted in Europe by highly trained professional forces fighting over limited terrain plentifully provided with roads and railways.

The disillusioning experience of the next few years did not at first lead to any major reappraisal of strategic doctrine by the military authorities of any of the belligerent powers. The German High Command still sought after decisive battles in the East while they encouraged their adversaries to bleed themselves to death against their western defences. The powers of the Western Entente still regarded their offensives on the Western Front as Napoleonic battles writ large: prolonged tests of endurance and willpower which would culminate in one side or the other, once its reserves were exhausted, collapsing at its weakest point and allowing the victorious cavalry of the opponent to flood through in glorious pursuit. From this view the United States Army, when it entered the war in 1917 did not basically dissent. The object of strategy remained, in spite of all changes in weapons and tactics, to concentrate all available resources at the decisive point, compelling the adversary to do the same, and there slug it out until a decision was reached. To this object all other considerations, diplomatic, economic and political, had to be subordinated.

But paradoxically, although military developments over the first hundred years had established the principle, indeed the dogma, of the "decisive battle" as the focus of all military (and civil) activity, parallel political and social development had been making it increasingly difficult to achieve this kind of "decision." On the Napoleonic battlefield the decision had to be taken by a single commander, to capitulate or to flee. It was taken in a discrete situation, when his reserves were exhausted, or the cohesion of his forces broken beyond repair. He could see that he had staked all and lost. And since the commander was often the political chief, as well, such a military capitulation normally involved also a political surrender. If it did not, then the victor's path lay open to the victim's capital, where peace could be dictated on his own terms. But by 1914 armies were no longer self-sufficient entities at the disposal of a single commander. Railways provided conduits along which reserves and supplies could come as fast as they could be produced. Telegraph and telephone linked commanders in the field to centres of political and military control where a different perspective obtained over what was going on at the battlefield. If by some masterpiece of tactical deployment an army in the field could be totally annihilated, as was the French at Sedan or the Russian at Tannenberg, a government with sufficiently strong nerves and untapped resources could set about raising others. Armies could be kept on foot and committed to action so long as manpower and material lasted, and national morale remained intact. Battles no longer provided clear decisions. They were trials of strength,

competitions in mutual attrition in which the strength being eroded had to be measured in terms not simply of military units but of national manpower, economic productivity, and ultimately the social stability of the belligerent powers. That was the lesson, if anybody had cared to learn it, of the American Civil War. European strategists had studied and praised the elegant manoeuvres of Jackson and Lee, but it was the remorseless attrition of Grant and the punitive destruction of Sherman which had ultimately decided the war. And once war became a matter of competing economic resources, social stability and popular morale, it became too serious a business to be left to the generals. Operations again became only one factor out of many in international struggle, and a "military" history or a combat history of the First World War can give only a very inadequate account indeed of that huge and complicated conflict.

For with the increasing participation of the community at large in the war there went the broadening of the political basis of society. The necessary efforts would not be made, and the necessary sacrifices would not be endured, by populations which were merely servile or indifferent: that had been the lesson Napoleon had taught the Prussians in 1806, and they had learned it well. Popular enthusiasm had to be evoked and sustained. A struggle in which every member of society feels himself involved brings about a heightening of national consciousness, an acceptance of hardship, a heroic mood in which sufferings inflicted by the adversary are almost welcomed, and certainly stoically endured. If more men are needed for the armies, they will be found, if necessary from among 15-16 year-olds. Rationing is accepted without complaint. Sacrifice and ingenuity will produce astonishing quantities of war material from the most unpromising economic and industrial base. Necessity and scientific expertise will combine to produce ingenious new weapons systems. And as the long process of attrition continues, at what point can it be "decided" that the war is lost?

By whom, moreover, is the decision to be made? The situation may deteriorate. The army may fight with flagging zeal; statistics of self-mutilation and desertion may show shocking increase; but the army does not break and run. Factories may work spasmodically and slowly, turning out increasingly inferior products: but they do not close their doors. The population grows undernourished and indifferent, absenting itself from work whenever it can safely do so, but it does not revolt. A staunch government can endure all this and still

carry on, so long as its police and its military remain loyal. Open dissent is, after all, treasonable. The emotional pressures no less than the political necessities of a wartime society create an environment in which moderation, balance, and far-sighted judgement are at a discount. Few men were more unpopular and ineffective, in France, Britain, and Germany during the First World War than those courageous souls who pressed for a compromise peace. Resolution and ruthlessness are the qualities which bring men to the front as leaders in wartime, and if they weaken there will be others to take their place. Ultimately nothing short of physical occupation and subjugation may prove adequate to end the war. That was what we found with Germany in 1945, and so I suspect the Germans would have found with Britain five years earlier. One of the most distinctive and disagreeable characteristics of twentieth century warfare is the enormous difficulty of bringing it to an end.

After the First World War, the classical strategic thinking came under attack from several quarters. There were the thinkers, in Britain and Germany, who hoped to replace the brutal slaughter of mutual attrition by new tactics based on mobility and surprise, which, by using armoured and mechanized forces instead of the old mass armies, would obtain on the battlefield results as decisive as those of Napoleon's campaigns. In the blitzkrieg of 1939 and 1940 it looked as if they had succeeded. The armies of Poland and France — not to mention those of Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and Great Britain — were destroyed or disrupted so rapidly that the political authorities were left literally defenceless and could only capitulate or flee. But this proved a passing phase in warfare, applicable only under temporary conditions of technical disequilibrium and effective only in the limited terrain of Western Europe. When the German armed forces met, in the Russians, adversaries who could trade space for time and who had developed their own techniques of armoured defence and offence, battles became as strenuous, and losses as severe, as any in the First World War.

Then there were the prophets who believed that it might be possible so to undermine the morale and the political stability of the adversary with propaganda and subversion that when battle was actually joined he would never have the moral strength to sustain it. This doctrine was based on a grotesque overestimate of the contribution which Allied propaganda had made to the collapse of the Central Powers in 1918. It appeared justified by

the rapidity with which the French armies collapsed in 1940 and the apparent equanimity with which France concluded peace with her conqueror and her hereditary foe. But propaganda and subversion, although very valuable auxiliaries to orthodox military action, cannot serve as a substitute for it. The British were to rely very heavily on these methods to try to undermine the Nazi Empire when they confronted it on their own in 1940 and 1941; but it was only when the United States entered the war, when Allied armed forces were deployed in strength in the Mediterranean and when the Russians were beginning to beat the Germans back from Stalingrad that these political manoeuvres began to show any signs of success.

Finally there were the prophets of air power, of whom the most articulate was the Italian Giulio Douhet, who believed that surface operations could be eliminated altogether by attacks aimed directly at the morale of the civilian population; a population who would, if their cities were destroyed around them, rise up and compel their governments to bring the war to an end. This doctrine, as we now know, overestimated both the destructiveness of high-explosive bombs and the capacity of aircraft to deliver them accurately and in adequate numbers to their targets in the technological conditions then obtaining; while it equally underestimated the capacity of civilian populations to survive prolonged ordeals which previously might have been considered unendurable. Bombing, in its early stages, in fact did a great deal to *improve* civilian morale. It gave a sense of exhilaration, of shared sacrifices, a determination not to yield to an overt form of terror. It engendered hatred, and hatred is good for morale. In its later stages, bombing did indeed result in increasing apathy and war weariness among the civilian populations of Germany and Japan; but it produced from them no effective and concerted demand that the war should be brought to an end. It was only one form, if the most immediate and terrifying, of the pressures being brought to bear on their societies to force a decision which their leaders stubbornly refused to take.

So the Second World War, like the First, was a conflict of attrition between highly organised and politically sophisticated societies, in which economic capacity, scientific and technological expertise, social cohesion and civilian morale proved to be factors of no less significance than the operations of armed forces in the field. The disagreements between British and American military leaders over Grand Strategy arose primarily from the British belief that much attrition could be to a great extent achieved by indirect means — by

bombing, by blockade, by propaganda, by subversion; whereas the United States Army believed that there could be no substitute for the classical strategic doctrine of bringing the enemy army to battle and defeating him at the decisive point and that could only be as it had been thirty years earlier, on the plains of Northwest Europe, in the kind of prolonged slugging match which Grant had taught it to endure but which Britain, after the Somme and Passchendaele, had learned, with some reason, to dread. The Americans had their way. Yet in the battles in France there was no clear decision; there was only a slow ebbing of moral and material forces from the German armies until retreat imperceptibly became rout, and military advance became political occupation. Then it was seen that the strength of the German nation had been drained into its armed forces — much as that of the Confederacy had been eighty years before; and the destruction of those armed forces meant the disappearance of the German State.

When the object in war is the destruction of the adversary's political independence and social fabric, the question of persuading him to acknowledge defeat does not arise. But the States of the modern world — certainly those of modern Europe — have seldom gone to war with so drastic an objective in mind. They have been concerned more frequently with preventing one another from pursuing policies contrary to their interests, and compelling them to accept ones in conformity with them. Wars are not simply acts of violence. They are acts of persuasion or of dissuasion; and although the threat of destruction is normally a necessary part of the persuading process, such destruction is only exceptionally regarded as an end in itself. To put it at its lowest, the total elimination of an adversary as an organised political entity, the destruction of him as an advanced working society, normally creates a dangerously infectious condition of social and economic chaos — as the Germans found with the Russian Revolution of 1917. It is likely to increase the postwar political and economic troubles of the victorious side — as the Allies found after 1945. Normally, it makes better sense to leave one's adversary chastened and submissive, in control of his own political and social fabric, and sufficiently balanced economically, if not to pay an indemnity in the good old style, then at least not to be a burden on the victors and force them to pay an indemnity to him. This means that, although the threat of destruction must be convincing, it is in one's interest to persuade the adversary to acknowledge defeat before that threat has to be carried out — a truism which loses none of its force in the nuclear age. In making war,

in short, it is necessary constantly to be thinking how to make peace. The two activities can never properly be separated.

What is making peace? It means persuading one's adversary to accept, or to offer, reasonable terms — terms in conformity with one's own overall policy. Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which this persuasion can be carried out. First it can be directed to the enemy government or regime itself, as is normally the case in so-called "limited wars." In such wars it is not part of one's policy to disrupt the social or political order in the enemy country. The existing regime, misguided as its policy may be, is probably the best that can be expected in the circumstances, and one does not want to see it replaced by wilder men or crumble into total anarchy. Alternatively, one may despair of men in power ever being brought to acknowledge defeat, as we despaired of Hitler; and even if they were to acknowledge defeat, of being relied on to abide by any agreement thereafter. Then one must seek to replace them by a more pliable regime. This can consist either of members of the same governing group seizing power by *coup d'état*, as the Italian Army did in 1943 and the Anti-Nazi conspirators tried to do in July 1944. Or one may aim at a fundamental social and political revolution — or counterrevolution — which will sweep away the old order altogether and install a government which is ideologically sympathetic to one's own.

Any one of these methods involves persuading significant individuals or significant groups in the opposing community, either those who already possess power or those who are capable of achieving power, that they have nothing to gain from further resistance, and a great deal to lose. In achieving such persuasion, there is, to borrow a famous phrase, no substitute for victory. It was not until defeat stared them in the face that substantial groups, in the Central Powers in the First World War or the Axis Powers in the Second, began to take effective measures to bring the war to an end. But the victor must still realise the enormous difficulties which will confront these groups in wartime from within their own society — in democracies from public opinion, in totalitarian societies from the secret police. If they are to carry public opinion with them — or opinion within their own elites — it may be necessary for the victor to make concessions to provide them with incentives as well as threats. It may be clear to them that peace at any price is better than continued and inescapable destruction, but peace with some semblance of honour provides a better basis for postwar stability, both on an international basis and within the domestic framework of

the defeated power. Strategy and policy have to work hand in hand to provide inducements as well as threats to secure a lasting settlement.

Everything that I have said so far applies to wars between States — organised communities fighting over incompatible goals. But most of the conflicts which have occurred since 1945 have not been of this kind at all. One can call them wars of liberation, guerrilla, insurgency or partisan wars, revolutionary wars, or, to use the rather charming British understatement “emergencies.” In all of them, the object on both sides has been the same. It is, by the judicious use of force or violence, to compel the other side to admit defeat and abandon his attempt to control certain contested territories. In this conflict the traditional method of destroying the armed power of the enemy is not sufficient, or sometimes even necessary: of yet greater importance is the maintenance, or the acquisition, of the positive support of the population in the contested area. The capacity to exercise military control and to prevent one’s opponent from doing the same is clearly a major and probably a decisive factor in gaining such support; yet if a guerrilla movement, in spite of repeated defeats and heavy losses, can still rely on a sympathetic population among whom its survivors can recuperate and hide, then all the numerical and technical superiority of its opponents may ultimately count for nothing.

In this kind of struggle for loyalties, military operations and political action are inseparable. In a more real sense than ever before, one is making war and peace simultaneously. The guerrilla organization is a civil administration as much as a fighting mechanism. It acquires increasing political responsibilities with its increasing military success until ultimately its leaders emerge from hiding as fully-fledged Heads of State and take their place among the great ones of the world. The established regime, on the other side, is concerned to keep operations within the category of policing, the maintenance of law and order, and to preserve the image of legitimate power which gains it the support of the uncommitted part of the population. In this struggle schools and hospitals are weapons, as important as military units. Defeat is acknowledged, not when one side or the other recognises that the destruction of its armed forces is inescapable, but when it abandons all hope of winning the sympathy of the population over to its side. In such a struggle it must be admitted that a foreign power fights indigenous guerrillas under disadvantages so great that even the most overwhelming preponderance in military force and weapons may be insufficient to make up

for them. In such wars, as in those of an earlier age, military operations are therefore only one tool of national policy, and not necessarily the most important. They have to be coordinated with others by a master hand.

In Viet Nam today, the United States faces two tasks. It has to help the government of South Viet Nam to attract that measure of popular support which alone will signify victory and guarantee lasting peace; and it has to persuade the government of North Viet Nam to abandon — and to abandon for good — its interference in the affairs of its neighbor. In tackling the first of these tasks it has to solve the difficulties with which both the French and the British wrestled in their colonial territories, with varying degrees of success, for the past twenty-odd years. In carrying out the second it faces what one can now call the traditional problem of 20th century warfare: how to persuade the adversary to come to terms without inflicting on him such severe damage as to prejudice all chances of subsequent stability and peace. In my personal judgement the Government of the United States, in tackling these tasks, has so far shown a far greater insight into their implications than it is given credit for by its critics, either of the Right or of the Left. It has understood that although armed force is, regrettably, a necessary element in its policy, that force must be exercised with precision and restraint; and that its exercise, however massive, will be not only useless but counterproductive if it is not integrated in a policy based on a thorough comprehension of the societies with which it is dealing, and a clear perception of the settlement at which it aims.

Operational histories of the Viet Nam campaign will one day be produced, and we can be sure that, in the tradition of American official histories, they will be full, frank, informative and just. But they will be only a part of the history of that war. The full story will have to spell out, in all its complexity, how the struggle has been waged, for more than twenty years, and between many participants, for the loyalties of the Vietnamese peoples. Such a study will show how policy and strategy have or have not been related. It is unlikely to distinguish clearly between military history on the one hand and social, political and economic history on the other. But it will shed much light on the problem which is of central concern to all mankind in the 20th Century, and to whose study the military historian — however we may define him — must cry to make some contribution: Under

what circumstances can armed force be used, in the only way in which it can be legitimate to use it, to ensure a lasting and stable peace?

