

Towards a New Way of War: American Strategy and the Utility of Force

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Abstract

The foundations of a typical American way of war that emerged out of a specific strategic culture were deeply challenged throughout American history by a succession of crises. The most significant of these was the failure of the American military intervention in Vietnam. This crisis produced crucial transformations that in turn engendered a new way of war. This new way of war, drawing upon the latest information and weaponry technology, allowed the USA to preserve its global status in the aftermath of the Cold War, but utterly failed to address the core concern of strategy that of giving war its effective political utility. This article attempts to evaluate the importance given in the USA to the understanding of military strategy on the light of internal and external variables and the extent to which this understanding reflects the significance given to the utility of military force as a continuation of politics.

Keywords: American Strategy; Crisis; New Way of War; Utility of Force; Vietnam War

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Résumé

Les fondements d'un mode de guerre américain typique issu d'une culture stratégique spécifique ont été profondément remis en cause tout au long de l'histoire américaine par une succession de crises. La plus importante d'entre elles a été l'échec de l'intervention militaire américaine au Vietnam. Cette crise a produit des transformations cruciales qui ont à leur tour engendré un nouveau mode de guerre. Ce nouveau mode de guerre, s'appuyant sur les dernières technologies de l'information et de l'armement, a permis aux États-Unis de préserver leur statut mondial au lendemain de la guerre froide, mais n'a absolument pas répondu à la préoccupation centrale de la stratégie, à savoir donner à la guerre son utilité politique effective. Cet article tente d'évaluer l'importance accordée aux États-Unis à la compréhension de la stratégie militaire à la lumière des variables internes et externes et la mesure dans laquelle cette compréhension reflète l'importance accordée à l'utilité de la force militaire en tant que continuation de la politique.

ملخص

تعرضت أسس أسلوب الحرب الأمريكي النموذجي الذي انبثق عن ثقافة استراتيجية محددة لتحدي عميق عبر التاريخ الأمريكي بسبب سلسلة من الأزمات. كان أهمها فشل التدخل العسكري الأمريكي في فيتنام. أنتجت هذه الأزمة تحولات حاسمة ولدت بدورها طريقة جديدة للحرب. هذه الطريقة الجديدة للحرب، بالاعتماد على أحدث تكنولوجيا المعلومات والأسلحة، سمحت للولايات المتحدة بالحفاظ على مكانتها العالمية في أعقاب الحرب الباردة، لكنها فشلت تمامًا في معالجة الشاغل الأساسي للاستراتيجية المتمثل في إعطاء الحرب منفعتها السياسية الفعالة. يحاول هذا المقال تقييم الأهمية المعطاة في الولايات المتحدة لفهم الاستراتيجية العسكرية على ضوء المتغيرات الداخلية والخارجية ومدى انعكاس هذا الفهم على الأهمية المعطاة لفائدة القوة العسكرية باعتبارها استمرارًا للسياسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجية أمريكية؛ أزمة؛ طريقة جديدة للحرب؛ فائدة القوة؛ حرب فيتنام

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Introduction :

Out of the specificities of the environment within which the United States of America grew to a global military power, a typical strategic culture emerged and gave birth to a distinct American way of war. This way of war reached its apotheosis during the Second World War, but faced a serious challenge because of America's subsequent military intervention in Vietnam. The crisis led to a reconsideration of the paradigm within which US military strategy has always been perceived and devised and eventually gave birth to a new way of war used for the first time during the Gulf Crisis of 1991.

Much has been written about the American Way of War. Military historian Russell F. Weigley first used the phrase in 1973 in his book *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. The book closely examines how key U.S. military and political figures thought about and practiced war starting from the American Revolution until Korea and comes up with the conclusion that a typical American Way of War emerged. The work, itself drawing upon key concepts, definitions and ideas elaborated by the nineteenth century Prussian military theoretician Carl Von Clausewitz in his book *On War*, became a significant reference for many scholars making research in the field of American strategic thought. For some, however, the book was lacking in that it took into consideration America's big wars only, denying a long tradition of small wars that had nothing in common with Weigley's American way of war. This small war tradition, thoroughly researched by Max Boot in his book *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, was necessary for the expansion, the economic growth and the security of the USA.

The present study addresses the fact that the assumption that only one specific exclusive American way of war exists is an oversimplification of American strategic thought. That is so because small wars are not aberrations to the American Way of War, as Weigley assumed, but are another variation of the American way of war, deeply rooted in American history. This article argues that the American way of war, as described by Weigley, does exist and represents the conventional tradition of big wars in the US. This tradition, contrary to what Max Boot assumes, is the real reflection of the American strategic preference, but also the most controversial as it necessitates the country's total mobilization and the people's considerable support. Consequently, this research, although establishing the small war tradition as an important military legacy in the USA and as one of the major foundations of a typical American way of war, closely examines the development of the major war tradition or the American Way of War prior to Vietnam and then its transformation into a new way of war.

How important were the challenges that a well-established classical tradition of warfare in the United States of America had been facing until Vietnam in producing a new way of war that better meets the demands of strategy? The many crises that the American way of war, gradually developing ever since the creation of the United States, had undergone during the Cold War – namely the failure of US military intervention in Southeastern Asia – did actually give birth to a new way of war. This transformation, however, did seemingly not succeed in giving the use of force its adequate political dimension within the nation's strategy, as it seems to have given no effective consideration to the non-military consequences of America's various wars.

The article starts with a description of the classical paradigm within which Americans used to fight their major wars prior to Vietnam, and how this paradigm gave birth to a distinct American way of war. It then highlights how this way of war faced a major crisis during the American military intervention in Vietnam, which eventually led to a revamping of the doctrines determining the use and utility of force in the USA. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 is then examined as the precursor of an era of American strategic history in which war would be perceived of and used in a new way. Finally, the findings of the research are evaluated on the basis of the ability of US strategists to fully comprehend and take in practical and effective consideration the political dimension of their country's wars.

This research makes use of a qualitative approach. It relies on the use of key concepts and key notions and on a close observation of the American way of war in practice. It focusses on carefully selected samples and relies on an alert reading of the major documents concerned with war making in the USA. It explores the wide arrays of dimensions influencing the way Americans think of and apply war and attempts to find out the why and explain the how for the sake of a deep and comprehensive understanding of the manner in which the classical American Way of war gave way to a new way of war.

I- The American Way of War

Three major foundations brought a typically American Way of War into existence: the frontier spirit, the American Constitution and the nineteenth century Western tradition of industrial war. The three established a strategic and military tradition that would remain relevant to the present time. This legacy would either build up the paradigm of a specific American Way of War, which is the way America fights its major wars, or give rise to other variations of this same way of war, used under different kinds of circumstances.

A distinctively American spirit appeared long before the USA was born, and engendered both a way of life and a way of warfare. The way early Americans made war remains an important part of a military legacy that still has its impact on American military strategy. Extirpative war, the use of rangers, and scalp hunting were the key elements of the early American way of war. It was a military tradition that accepted legitimized and encouraged attacks upon and the destruction of non-combatants, their villages and their logistical resources including agricultural products. The colonials' first way of war consisted of two major elements: unlimited war and irregular war. The frequent blurring of boundaries between combatants and non-combatants would become a living legacy of the first American way of war. (Grenier, 2005, pp. 10-15) The frontier wars against the native inhabitants of America set the USA down its military trajectory as they led to a predisposition to target civilian populations.

This first American way of war was used to subjugate the Indians and to secure the conquest of the trans-Appalachian West, but it would also be the American ancestor of guerrilla warfare, a small war tradition that would accompany the territorial expansion as well as the economic and military growth of the USA. It is a military tradition in which campaigns would generally be fought by a relatively small number of professional soldiers in the pursuit of limited objectives deploying limited means against the forces of less developed countries. (Boot, 2014) Small wars or guerrillas are not always necessarily 'small' versions of ordinary warfare; the term does actually not refer to the scale of combat, but to the kind of military tactics employed. (Quester, 2007, p. 110)

The American Constitution ratified in 1887 is the second major foundation of a typical American Way of War. It clearly divides the war powers of the federal government between the executive and the legislative branches. Article II, section 2 of the Constitution makes of the President Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, while article I, section 8 gives the Congress the power to declare war. The President has the power to decide upon the way the war is to be fought, but that could happen only after the decision to go to war had been sufficiently debated by the people's representatives inside the American Congress. (Lees, 1982, pp. 2, 6) This distinction between declaring war and waging it remained the norm and the way America fights its big wars for about two centuries in the USA. This was meant to prevent any kind of presidential abuse of power or arbitrary rule. The new nation, embedded with attributes of democracy, was not meant to be a war-like society. (Schmidt, 2005, p. 18) At the same time, making the President Commander in Chief of the armed forces set the principle of civilian supremacy over the military; the aim was to keep a watchful eye upon uniformed officials and to prevent them from taking the lead. This served as a check against incipient militarism. (Bacevich, 2003, p. 124)

The tradition of antimilitarism and aversion to wars had already been firmly set by the Founding Fathers, even before the adoption of the American Constitution. Avoiding large standing armies and excessive taxation became the norm for the American citizens. The newly born nation, decided to keep away from seventeenth and eighteenth century European dynastic and territorial wars. (Schmidt, 2005, p. 49) This aversion to war, however, never meant that Americans were, in essence, given to pacifism. War had been the way Americans subjugated the Native Americans, obtained independence from the British Empire, expanded their territory and brought the seceding states back under federal flag. Their growing need to frequently make use of force to attain specific aims led to the development of a specific war culture marrying bellicosity to antimilitarism. During peacetime, the military establishment, an army of a

modest size, was kept at the margin of life, but in times of emergency, a sheer mass of citizen soldiers was raised to wage the countries wars. (Bacevich, 2003, p. 124)

The nineteenth century tradition of popular industrial war firmly established by the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815) is the third foundation of the American way of war. Napoleon Bonaparte brought a new understanding of the utility of war. (Kaldor, 2012, p. 23) Wars, starting from the nineteenth century became armed conflicts between states, based on the manoeuvre of forces in sheer mass, gathered through compulsory service, and the entire backing of the state's manpower and industrial base at the expense of all other interests and for the purpose of absolute victory. (Smith, 2006, pp. 16-30) Carl Von Clausewitz, who had participated in the Napoleonic Wars on the losing side, introduced the Hegelian notion of 'absolute war', which is the inner tendency of any war towards the total destruction of the enemy. This ideal concept of absolute war has its own existence, and this existence is in tension with empirical realities, or the friction in real war, which tends to limit the scope of absolute war. Three main concepts make up the theory of war for Carl Von Clausewitz, first is the relevance of and balance between the state, the army and the people, a trinity without which war cannot succeed. The second is the primacy of policy, which results from the fact that war has its root in a political object that must be kept in sight. The third is the 'trial of strength and clash of wills': victory is achieved through a careful balancing of the war efforts with the enemy's powers of resistance. The means used must be in proportion with the strength of his will. (Clausewitz, 1968, pp. 102, 292)

Victory, which is the immediate war aim, can be obtained through one of two major means. The first aims at the complete overthrow of the enemy through an utter destruction of his war-making capability, or annihilation. The second, attrition, resorts to an indirect approach to victory, that of gradually eroding the power of the enemy to the point of exhaustion. The kind of victory that a state means to attain determines the strategy it adopts. On the basis of this distinction, the American way of war had undergone a shift from a strategy of attrition to a strategy of annihilation. Attrition had been employed, prior to the Civil War (1861-1865), when the country's economic and military capabilities could not allow for more ambitious war aims. The American Revolution, the first of US major wars, fought to obtain independence from one of the greatest world empires then, was a war of attrition. (Weigley, 1973, pp. 3-39)

Annihilation that was the culmination of a long process of strategic development became the typical way America wages its wars starting from the Civil War (1861-1865). The American Civil War took place in a time when the USA had significantly grown economically and militarily. It was framed on the Napoleonic model of people's industrial wars that grew into total wars after the introduction of the Prussian reforms including the 'thinking' soldier and the introduction of the general staff. It was also a way of war that drew upon the immense industrial innovations of the Industrial Revolution (1875-1885), namely iron and steam, based on the neat understanding that industrial capability decides the outcome of war. (Smith, 2006, pp. 52-76) It incorporated the new developments in transport, communication and weaponry, making effective use of the major dramatic developments in industrial technology applied to the military field namely the railway and the telegraph, together with the mass production of guns pioneered and used for the first time in the USA. (Kaldor, 2012)

A clear-cut strategic culture relying upon typically American advantages was thus emerging with the approach of the twentieth century. A set of profound economic and geographical conditions were beginning to shape the future of wars in the USA. The vast natural realities in addition to the political, economic and military developments of the country made this transition from attrition to annihilation not only possible but also necessary. The US had a pronounced benefit in men and material because of its gigantic continental territory endowed with abundant natural resources and with a population larger than that of most European powers. The correspondingly extensive transportation and communication network built both inside and outside a country bordered by two vast oceans was likewise of momentous significance. An immense industry and an advanced technology helped build this network. This gave the US a distinct advantage in the rapid movement of people and products in peace and of men and material in war. A soaring weapons system was similarly developed with the

use of technology. Mass, mobility and high technology made of the USA the most successful military power of the twentieth century. (Weigley, 1973, pp. 92-152) Parallel to those three military advantages, high public support for the war effort and America's reliance upon allied countries, in its twentieth-century wars, to provide a good deal of manpower and material while fighting common enemies, were two important attributes. (Kurth, 2007, p. 53)

These advantages made of the twentieth century an American century by excellence. This was forcefully validated by the US epic victory in WWII. A victory that would create and firmly establish a US military paradigm that would persist until the end of the twentieth century. During the course of the Second World War (1939-1945), the development of the American way of war culminated in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The use of the atomic bomb, the absolute weapon, to close WWII made of the American Way of War a strategy of annihilation by excellence. The atomic bomb was an outstanding development, the most amazing ever since the mechanization of warfare and the introduction of military air power, submarines and aircraft carriers in WWI. Total destruction of the enemy became practically possible. (Kurth, 2007, p. 54). America's magnificent show of military prowess during WWII, the use of the nuclear bomb to force Japan into surrender and definitely close hostilities determinedly established the USA as an uncontested superpower.

II- The American Way of War under Challenge

The end of WWII marked the beginning of the Cold War. Until 1949, the USA enjoyed military superiority over the USSR because of its exclusive possession of the absolute bomb. Nevertheless, the strategic landscape immediately and permanently changed when the Soviet empire did successfully test its own atomic bomb in September 1949, and then in January 1950 signed a long-term treaty of cooperation and friendship with Communist China. Two months earlier the Chinese Communist armies had completed their conquest of mainland China. (Schulzinger, 1998, pp. 222-224). The USA had to quickly respond with new drastic measures meant to contain Soviet and Communist expansion. It started with the implementation of the strategy set by National Security Council Report number 68 (NSC-68), a document signed by the Truman administration and recommending the use of military means to contain Soviet and Communist advances. (National Security Council Paper No. 68, 1989, pp. 301-305) What ensued was a strategy of deterrence, meant to dissuade the USSR and any other potential enemy from attacking the USA. Deterrence was centred on military preparations for a potential nuclear war. (Kurth, 2007, p. 50)

Thermonuclear-war option generated the idea of annihilating whole urban populations to the point of mutually assured destruction, MAD. All traditional constrictions on Carl Von Clausewitz' 'absolute war', a war where utter annihilation of the enemy becomes a practical feasibility, have at last been removed and the complete realization of such a war has seemingly for the first time become possible. Yet this very fact of mutual assured destruction made war, per se, self-negating, self-defeating, and ultimately invalid as a means of policy. The modern American total war with its nuclear dimension faced a fundamental crisis and strategy had consequently to focus on finding uses for war outside the total nuclear warfare. (Shaw, 2005, p. 5) If force had to be used without the spectre of mutual destruction, then it had to be used in a limited way. Short of absolute war, limited war became the alternative, the only possible way war could be fought within the scope of deterrence. (Greenberg & Plano, 1985, p. 495)

As a result of the Domino Theory the USA became involved in military interventions in the Third World. A series of such interventions in support of allied governments and -or- against revolutionary states would begin with the American intervention in the Korean Civil War in 1950 and culminate in its involvement in Vietnam between 1965 and 1973. (Dumbrell, 2012, pp. 69-131) American military involvement in Korea between 1950 and 1953 inaugurated an era of limited war tradition in the USA, a return to a strategy of attrition rather than annihilation. The intervention was deemed successful since the war aim, which was the restoration of the South Korean territorial integrity, was attained. (Kurth, 2007, p. 67)

With the same approach in mind, that of resorting to limited means to attain limited objectives so as to avoid nuclear escalation, the USA deployed its troops to Vietnam. With the French departure from Vietnam in 1954, and the division of the country into a communist north and an anti-communist south, the USA took on the responsibility of creating a post-colonial independent anti-communist state in the south of Vietnam by providing financial and military support. US commitment to Vietnam became increasingly militarized after the communist National Liberation Front (NLF) launched an offensive against the Saigon regime in the South. During 1961—1964 the USA was trying to defeat the Communist insurgents in South Vietnam by providing military aid and advisors to the forces of the South Vietnamese government. As this effort was manifestly insufficient, the USA decided to take the responsibility for directing the war in the countryside against the NLF instead of withdrawing and leaving Saigon to deal with the communist 'threat'. (Schulzinger, 1998, p. 255).

The 'Gulf of Tonkin incident' was the *casus belli* necessary for obtaining the 'blank cheque' given by US Congress – The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution – to the Johnson administration in August 1964 for a full-scale military involvement in Vietnam. Operation Rolling Thunder – a set of bombing raids – on North Vietnam was launched. Within a few months, the Johnson administration (1963-1969) decided to deploy large numbers of ground forces to South Vietnam and a full-scale US war in Vietnam began. (Kurth, 2007, p. 69) Despite a huge deployment of American troops on Vietnamese ground to wage the 'counter-insurgency' battles, US strategists heavily relied on air power bombing killing civilians among whom guerrillas hid. That was done with the belief that cruel and extensive bombing campaigns including incendiary bombs (Napalm) and defoliant (Agent Orange), as well as a variety of conventional explosives, would, in time, bring North Vietnam to its knees. (Schmidt, 2005, p. 284).

The acute violence of the war, together with the difficulty of identifying and sparing Vietnamese civilians, fuelled a growing anti-war movement in the late 1960's in the USA. For the first time in the nation's history, television cameras brought the theatre of war into American homes. Images of bombed villages, burned children, and dead bodies flashed across the TV screen and gave real faces to the innocent Vietnamese victims of the war. The mass media was, for the first time in US history, playing a major role in foreign policy. The exploding media coverage exposed the real nature of the Vietnam War with its scale, length and moral ambiguity to the American public awareness. (Magstadt, 2004, p. 142) President Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, came to office in 1969 with a plan to end the war in Vietnam, the so-called 'peace with honour' policy and a plan of gradually withdrawing the US forces. It was an utter stalemate where neither the massive bombing campaigns, nor any other option could produce the desired outcome, that of insuring a face-saving way out of Vietnam. (Magstadt, 2004, p. 143)

What was meant by the USA to be a limited war in Southeast Asia, turned into a dragging conflict with enormous costs: in addition to the number of troops stationed in the area, Washington was spending around thirty-five billion dollars per year. The human cost was even larger: by the time the two sides signed a cease-fire in January 1973, 58,000 US soldiers had been killed, (Fisher, 2012, p. 131) Although American military involvement in both Vietnam and Korea does have the same political objective, Vietnam was a different type of conflict. The war in Korea had been a conventional war, fought between two massive organized armies. Its frontlines were relatively clear. The Vietnam War, however; was characterized by often unclear lines, battles waged in muddy jungles and, most importantly, guerrilla-style assaults on US forces by civilian Vietnamese. That was a kind of insurgency the US military, trained, structured and equipped to wage large-scale conventional wars, was ill prepared to counter. (Kurth, 2007, pp. 60-70) America's military superiority did not seem to make any difference in the outcome of the war. The very tenet of the American Way of War was completely destroyed by the Vietnam military experience.

Waging a war in South-East Asia against an enemy committed to national liberation demanded an ability to resolve deep-seated local and regional socio-political problems and that presupposed the use of long-term unlimited power. Military strategists were supposed to be simultaneously fighting a war and building a nation, which turned out to be impossible and ended up in the utter destruction of the very

country Washington was supposed to be attempting to build. For the Vietnamese, the outcome of the war would determine their survival as a nation, their very existence. They were willing to die for the sake of their national unity. What was at stake made endurance and then ultimate victory the only choice available to Ho Chi Minh and his countrymen. (Schell, 2007, pp. 22-24)

According to many American military analysts, Vietnam exposed the defects inherent in the concept of limited war. Uniformed officers were blaming meddling civilians who, in essence, lacked military experience and knowledge of military history, for their ill management of the conflict, exhausting the US army in a counterinsurgency instead of allowing for a swift and decisive resolution of the conflict by destroying the northern military forces and overthrowing their government. A serious civil-military rupture was induced by Vietnam. The ambiguity about America's aims in Southeast Asia, lack of confidence that these could be achieved quickly and lack of conviction that those aims were worth prolonged sacrifice of American soldiers all led to a popular consensus that Vietnam had been much more than a mere mistake, but fundamentally wrong and immoral. (Ferguson, 2005, pp. 96-102) The US had fought in Vietnam a war utterly at odds with its own principle and ended up losing its prestige. The war also demonstrated the limits of technology: that exclusive reliance on air power by itself was never enough, that wars are still won or lost on the ground. It demonstrated that, for democracies, a home turf can become a battlefield as well. Vietnam illustrated the importance of domestic consensus when American soldiers are sent abroad to fight and die. Neither the American decision makers and the Pentagon nor the people could ever imagine losing a war to a Third World country like North Vietnam. The Indochina debacle ended the illusion of American invincibility. (Magstadt, 204, pp. 143-144) It gave birth to a long period of soul-searching and self-doubt.

At this point, the model of limited war became as problematic as the model of absolute war that had reached its crisis in the nuclear arms race. (Shaw, 2005, p. 7) The Vietnam War had, consequently, serious implications on the conceptualisation of military power in the USA. In 1970, President Richard Nixon (1969-1974) declared that US allies would have to assume the primary responsibility of their own security and defence, rather than depend on American military intervention. (The Nixon Doctrine, 1969) From now on, the USA would fight only when its national interests were at stake. The 'Vietnam Syndrome', the reluctance to send the troops abroad for military interventions, resulted in 'No more Vietnams', the decision to never again intervene in guerrilla wars in Southeast Asia or elsewhere in the world. (Fisher, 2012, p. 131) The unease and the suspicion resulting from US failure in Vietnam were a flagrant reflection of flaws inherent in the strategy underlining US war making, the very utility of force to reach political objectives. The Vietnam War led to a serious questioning of America's strategic underpinnings. It became a matter of momentous urgency to give war its proper value and put it back on its initial trajectory; over a century earlier, Carl Von Clausewitz had defined war as "the continuation of politics by other means." (1968, p. 202)

III- A New Way of War

Thoughtful army leaders in various army think tanks, including the Army War College, took on the endeavour of formulating a profound, explicit, comprehensive and elaborate doctrine that would set up clear strictures on any future deployment of US forces abroad. The aim was to preclude any potential recurrence of the calamity that had befallen the USA military in Southeast Asia, by giving military power its proper utility within American foreign policy. Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger, the major architect of the formula, publically revealed the terms of a new doctrine, in a speech he delivered at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. This doctrine was meant to redefine the uses of American military power. The second architect of the doctrine was Weinberger's top military aid, Colin Powell, a Vietnam veteran who belonged to a generation of young officers who had served in Indochina. (Bacevich, 2003, p. 240)

After explaining the reasons for which such a doctrine had to be formulated, Caspar Weinberger first enunciated a set of preconditions for committing US forces abroad. The doctrine permits intervention only when "vital national interests were at stake;" only in the pursuit of "clearly defined political and military objectives;" the relationship between ends and means "must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary;" only with prior "reasonable assurance" of popular and Congressional support; and only "as a last resort", when all diplomatic measures had failed. Second, the formula insisted that once the civilians decided on war, it became incumbent upon them to allow soldiers a free hand in fighting it. "If we decide it is necessary to put combat troops into a given situation, we should do so wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning. If we are unwilling to commit the US forces or resources necessary to achieve our objectives, we should not commit them at all". (Weinberger, 1984) In succeeding years, another precondition became widely accepted as part of the doctrine—all US deployments must have an 'exit strategy.' (Boot, 2014, p. 319)

Under the terms of this doctrine, wars would take place infrequently and end swiftly and tidily. While setting out to reinvent warfare, the US uniformed leaders did in reality return to the style of warfare they are most comfortable with, that is conventional warfare against armies organized and equipped along clearly defined lines. (Boot, 2014, p. 319) The doctrine came to reinforce and show up the officer corps' distaste of people's protracted and ambiguous war saturated with political complexity and preference for the classical American way of war, based on the clash of opposing armies, and where campaigns and battles, directed by military elites (not civilians), determined the outcome of the war. (Bacevich, 2003, p. 241) The criteria that would from now on guide American military interventions abroad was meant to prevent a future Vietnam but also to put fetters on US use of force. War would again take its proper place in the Republic's international endeavours and would always end in overwhelming victory.

To ensure an overwhelming victory to all of America's coming wars, a set of transformations in the very way war would take place on the ground were also introduced. These had already started about a decade earlier with the introduction of AVF, the All-Volunteer Force in 1973 and the official end of compulsory military service. (Quester, 2007, p. 114) The second of these transformations concerned efforts to outspend the Soviet Union on strategic nuclear weapons so as to make deterrence effective again. The army came up with the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI)—popularly labelled 'Star Wars', a novel vision for a high-technology anti-ballistic missile system calling for the development of a missile defence system capable of effectively intercepting and destroying incoming enemy intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM's). (Magstadt, 2004, p. 156)

The third transformation concerned non-nuclear technologies. This means significantly improved capabilities in battlefield control, command, communication and information (C³I) and precision guided munitions (PGMs) so that US pronounced advantage in mobility and technology could creatively be used to trump the Soviet advantage in mass. These new technologies were together termed ET (emerging technologies) and brought a revolution in military affairs (RMA). In the 1980's, the US army built upon these amazing new technologies and concepts and produced a new battlefield strategy, the Air-Land Battle Doctrine, which coherently integrated C³I, air power and land power. The army made a convincing case that this new strategy enabled it to fight and win a conventional (non-nuclear) war against the Soviet Union. (Kurth, 2007, pp. 65, 73-74)

RMA had more to do with the way the various military organizations adjust and shape novel technology, operational concepts and military systems, the way in which a military 'information infrastructure' allows for the instantaneous collection, collation and distribution of masses of real-time information. (Shaw, 2005, p. 32) The military transformations under way in the 1980's symbolized the need for greater, more effective coordination based on integration and synchronization of the different military services. The use of C³I held the promise of diminishing—almost to the point of eradicating—the intrinsic confusion of the 'fog of war.' (Quester, 2007, p. 123)

By 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. It was the end of the Cold War. Bipolarity, containment, the balance of terror, proxy wars were all over. The fall of the

Soviet empire coincided with the tenure of the republican President George H. W. Bush (1989-1993). The president announced that the USA had won the Cold War and was now shouldered with the responsibility of building and protecting a 'New World Order' that replaced the ancient Cold War world. In this world, the president declared, US military might was unquestionably important to support America's global role. The security focus had to be reoriented to regional contingencies in the developing world, where US presence would be paramount to deter any potential conflict that might destabilise the international order and put in jeopardy America's own interests. (Dumbrell, 2012, pp. 84-86)

Within this context, the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein invaded neighbouring Kuwait. The Bush administration had, prior to this invasion, kept close relations with Iraq. (Offner, 2007, p. 30) Yet, when Iraq invaded and annexed the oil-rich Kuwait, threatening to control the Middle East's oil fields, the adventure was deemed intolerable. The post-Cold war context enabled the USA to play the role of the upholder of international law and mobilize the support of the United Nations. It also militarily and politically enabled the ensuing war to take place. (Shaw, 2005, p. 14) Consequently, President George Bush denounced Iraqi's "naked aggression" and declared: "this will not stand." (Scowcroft & Bush, 1998, p. 303) At the same time, he declared Saudi Arabia, containing 20 percent of the world's oil reserves, to be a vital US interest, and immediately sent 200,000 troops there under the mission name of Operation Desert Shield to defend the country from a potential Iraqi assault. (Offner, 2007, p. 31)

US Congress approved President Bush's request and authorized him to employ military force against Iraq under the auspices of the United Nations. A magnificent air, land and sea US-led coalition was stationed in Saudi Arabia. To provide what Defence Secretary Dick Cheney described as an 'offensive capacity', President Bush doubled the size of the US expeditionary troops to over 500,000 meant to evict Iraq out of Kuwait. (Schulzinger, 1998, p. 364) The US-led coalition air bombing campaign against Iraqi forces started in mid-January 1991 and lasted five weeks. It included incessant bombing of Iraqi positions in Kuwait and southern Iraq as well as Baghdad and Iraq's economic structure. It was then followed by a ground assault from Saudi Arabia. Operation Desert Storm ejected the Iraqi Army from Kuwait and a cease-fire ended the conflict in February. (Offner, 2007, p. 31) For the first time the United States put the combined use of its 'smart' bombs, standoff weapons, C³I and GPS to the test. (Magstadt, 2004, p. 172)

The war lasted less than six weeks and cost the US 147 American soldiers, one-fourth of whom were victims of friendly fire. The financial cost of the military campaign was borne by other coalition members namely Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. (Ferguson, 2005, p. 136) The way the decision was taken and the war was fought strictly conformed to the Weinberger Doctrine. President Bush's conduct of the war as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces showed that he had fully grasped the lessons of Vietnam with his civilian leadership in wartime, by identifying clear and realistic objectives, providing the military with everything it needed and then getting out of their way. (Bacevich, 2007, p. 246) The decisive victory at a reasonable cost of Operation Desert Storm surpassed expectations. President Bush proudly proclaimed that the United States had at last "kicked the Vietnam syndrome". (Scowcroft & Bush, 1998, p. 400)

The Gulf War showed that the USA had perfectly assimilated the Vietnam lessons. It highlighted the competence and the capabilities of US army, and, at the same time, justified the high cost of the military build-up of the preceding decade by demonstrating the utility of American military prowess outside the Cold -War context. It allowed the US to maintain its military primacy and validated America's capacity of global leadership. (Bacevich, 2003, p. 59) Similarly, the war had an immense impact on the validity of the US military vision. Operation Desert Storm demonstrated the military's precious wisdom acquired from Vietnam and restored both its image and its credibility in the eyes of the American public. The war did repair the rupture in the civil-military relations caused by the Vietnam War two decades earlier. Thanks to the success of Operation Desert Storm, Colin Powell believed, "the American people fell in love again with their armed forces." (Powell, 2003, p. 532)

The US conduct of the Gulf War, the cheap and quick military victory vindicated not only the Powell approach, but the Air-Land Battle Doctrine as well. The army made use of extraordinary mobility of the ground forces, application of sheer mass at the enemy's weak lines in addition to flexibility and surprise, with the amazing reliance on C³I high technology. (Kurth, 2007, p. 79) The US military was much proud of the successful combination of stealth technology, PGM's (precision-guided missiles) and satellite aided navigation that allowed a kind of precision bombing never achieved before. (Shaw, 2005, p. 14-15)

The media-management proved quite successful. Vietnam had taught the Americans how public opinion decisively counts in both the conduct and the outcome of the war. Coverage of Operation Desert Storm was mostly pro-war and public opinion remained overwhelmingly positive. (Shaw, 2005, p. 16) The American public perceived Operation Desert Storm as a masterpiece in terms of military triumph, an amazing demonstration of how unbeatable the Americans had become in the art of warfare. Shows of precision guidance – most noticeably in the image of 'smart' bombs entering command centres or of the *tomahawk* cruise missiles, fired from an old battleship adapted for the purpose stationing 1,000 kilometres away, finding its way through the streets of Baghdad, penetrating its target by the front door and ultimately exploding. The media broadcast shows of the care and confidence with which the troops chose and then attacked their targets with minimal civil casualties. This worked to Washington's best advantage. (Freedman, 2006, p. 12)

Thanks to the lessons learned from America's failure in Southeastern Asia, and contrary to Vietnam, the Gulf War basically conformed to the classical American way of war. The five major features of the distinctive classical strategic culture were all available, including reliance on overwhelming mass, wide-ranging mobility, high technology weapons system, considerable public support for the war effort, and, finally, reliance upon allied countries. The innovation was first in its total reliance on AVM, the All-Volunteer Force that brought immense transformations in the quality of the US army. Second, the way in which new highly developed technologies allowed for the integration, coordination and synchronization of the actions of the different military services significantly reduced the fog of war. Last, but foremost, and in accordance with America's aversion to the human cost of war, the Persian Gulf War highlighted the capacity of RMA, AVF and the Weinberger doctrine in greatly reducing US casualties.

Unlike America's classical wars, the Persian Gulf War had a significantly low cost in terms of human casualties. RMA had seemingly succeeded in endowing the USA with a greater ability to reduce its human cost of wars. The USA could now, it turned out, intervene militarily, thanks to these new technological possibilities, while sparing its population the horrors of being involved in war, not disrupting their daily lives in the process. The innovations in America's way of war transformed the American citizen into a mere spectator of a war his country is making with an utter human and moral detachment. (Quester, 2007, p. 125) This low-cost way of war guarantees the support of a public who now perceives its country's military adventures as a remote vision with which they are not concerned. If America was to obtain and maintain public support for its military endeavours, it had first to guarantee the safety of the bulk of its troops. If a democracy is to make war then it must assure, not that the object of war is necessarily just, but that its human cost of that same war be low.

The amazing, quick and relatively low-cost US victory in evicting Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, however, was one side of the coin only. The other side reflects the immediate as well as the long-term repercussions of the American military involvement in the Persian Gulf crisis. If the use of technology spared the lives of American and coalition soldiers, it did result in the killing of a huge number of Iraqis. The Iraqi battle deaths vary between 25,000 and 250,000 as a result of extensive bombardments of large troop concentration. USA and coalition forces entirely and ruthlessly decimated the defeated retreating Iraqi Army on the 'highway of death' in 1991. (Schulzinger, 1998, p. 364) The war turned out to be a real human agony for the innocent Iraqi people as well, a fact that obviously troubles the common sense of morality. Fought against the mainland of a populated country, the campaign completely damaged the infrastructure on which civilians depended. The US aircraft had flown

about 110,000 sorties against Iraq, dropping 88,500 tons of bombs, including cluster bombs and depleted uranium devices. It destroyed food processing and water purification plants, electric power stations, bridges, roads, schools, hospitals and telephone exchanges throughout the entire country. (Johnson, 2004, p. 225)

In the aftermath of the war, the country was plunged in a state of chaos and preindustrial life conditions. Hospitals and sewage treatment plants could not function in the absence of electricity. Epidemics ravaged the country in the absence of drinking water. The United Nations' observers reported near apocalyptic life situation in Iraq and a group of specialists from Harvard had foreseen the death of at least 170,000 children under five because of the delayed effects of the war. A huge number of innocent Iraqi people lost their lives due to the bombing of infrastructure; more than 100,000 died from dysentery, malnutrition, diseases and dehydration. Many more would succumb to the punitive economic sanctions imposed on Iraq. (Hendrickson, 1992, pp. 73-79)

Ensuing events would indeed question the alleged success of the Gulf War. The failed Kurd insurrections, for example led to disastrous suffering and repression of the Iraqi people. The destruction of electricity, water and sewage systems resulted in a long-term high death toll and agony. The failure to manage the political and international difficulties to deal with the Saddam regime led to serious outcomes including the unbearable economic sanctions and the impoverishment of huge numbers of Iraqis over the following decade. The constant bombing to enforce the no-fly zones in the north and in the south of Iraq and many other events would lead to much reluctance in using the word 'success' that confidently. (Shaw, 2005, p. 17)

In the aftermath of the liberation of Kuwait, President Bush enthused: "I would think, because of what had happened, we won't have to use U.S. forces around the world. I think when we say something is objectively correct...people are going to listen". (Qtd. in Bacevich, 2003, p. 61) A few people did not listen, though, or, in listening, came up with different conclusions. Notwithstanding the startling and impressive show of America's military might in Operation Desert Storm, it would not manage to preclude effective and numerous instances of resistance to US policy. America's military might would soon prove of limited utility in imposing America's will. (Bacevich, 2003, p. 61)

The Gulf War would thus in both the short as well as the long run highlight the rather shaky ground on which the New World Order stood. The result was, rather than a new world order, a world of bigger disorder infecting areas of sharp sensitivity; Saddam Hussein's act of aggression was the first manifestations of this disorder, but, by no means, the last. (Bacevich, 2003, 61) The American marvelous military might in Desert Storm that inspired awe and deference in some quarters of the globe, would lead to bigger opposition to America's global leadership in others. Many were unwilling to abide by the rules of President Bush's new world order. Instead of effectively reducing the commitment of US troops abroad, the Persian Gulf US show of force would lead to a more frequent use of military force. Actually, the United States would, under the presidency of George W.H. Bush, find itself employing its troops more frequently rather than less in many new and distant areas. In 1991, the president committed US forces to protecting Iraqi Kurds and Shiites from the depredations of the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein before ultimately quasi-permanent no-fly-zones- were created in the north and in the south of Iraq, patrolled by US aircraft. (Magstadt, 2004, p. 173) President Bush would also, contrary to his own expectations, send US troops, the following year, into harm's way in Somalia for the sake of a humanitarian intervention and would likewise inaugurate in the waning days of his tenure the US regular practice of using pinpoint air attacks against Iraq to express dissatisfaction with Pr. Saddam Hussein's defiance and 'untrustworthiness'. (Schulzinger, 1998, p. 365)

Not only did the spectacular military victory leave much unresolved, but it would immediately be "highly counterproductive", as Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter, had predicted before Operation Desert Storm started, simply because the US interests at stake in the area were neither vital nor urgent so as to necessitate an American military intervention. Admiral William J. Crow, Colin Powell's predecessor as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had also warned against an acute exacerbation of already existing tensions in the

Middle East if the US came to initiate hostilities in the region. Deploying US troops to the Middle East would, according to both, inflame the Arab world, stir up Middle Eastern politics and alienate America's European allies. (Bacevich, 2003, p. 64) US military bases were now ringing Iraq, from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the south to Turkey in the north; tanks and ammunition were prepositioned in case hostilities were reopened. These came to reinforce the already existing formidable US naval fleet in the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf. (Johnson, 2004, p. 226)

CONCLUSION

A typical American way of War was born out of the specificities of the American experience, the marriage of bellicosity and antimilitarism created by the Founding Fathers, the nineteenth century Napoleonic warfare tradition and the natural, economic and technological wealth of the United States. It was a way of war based on a strategy of annihilation aiming at nothing short of the complete overthrow of the enemy. Starting with the American Civil War and culminating in the nuclear close of the Second World War, the classical American way of war, based on the use of overwhelming force to achieve decisive victory, would then face a serious challenge emanating from the balance of terror that would become the defining trait of the Cold War era. Mutual Assured Destruction, inherent in any potential thermonuclear war between the USA and the Soviet Union, nullified the feasibility of war per se. The inability to make use of America's formidable military prowess to reach overwhelming victories led to the adoption of a strategy of limited war, fought with limited means and reaching for limited objectives. The strategy had proved relatively successful in Korea, but turned into an utter disaster in Vietnam. Having habitually been focusing on the development of nuclear deterrence and on the improvement of conventional warfare, the US military strategy proved seemingly lacking in counterinsurgency techniques that needed to be used against guerrilla forces in Indochina.

The war aftermath was marked by a Vietnam Syndrome and eventually led to a serious questioning of the flaws inherent in America's classical way of waging war and of the very premises on which this way of war was built. Deciphering the Vietnam lessons led to a set of transformations in America's strategic thinking. A Weinberger Doctrine redefined the why and the how of US military adventures, placing powerful fetters on the deployment of US troops so as to avoid vague entanglement in revolutionary or regional conflicts in the world unless US interests were clearly at stake. It consisted of important criteria including the use of overwhelming force on behalf of national interest with clearly defined objectives and a reasonable popular support to achieve quick and decisive victory. This coincided with a set of technological and coordinating innovations developed under the name of the Revolution in Military Affairs. These transformations gave the USA an unmatched military superiority in conventional warfare, while the Strategic Defence Initiative gave it a pronounced nuclear advantage. The army was also improving with the ending of the draft, compulsory military service, and the adoption of the All-Volunteer-Force. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the USA was enjoying full military superiority and hence set out to establish a 'New World Order'. The first challenge to this world order was Iraqi's invasion of Kuwait to which the USA responded with vigour, evicting and defeating Iraqi forces in no more than six weeks.

The shift from the draft to the AVF, the Weinberger Doctrine, RMA, the victorious closure of the Cold War, the quick and relatively low-cost success in the Persian Gulf War all combined to transform U.S. approach to warfare. Mass mobilization, compulsory military service and popular involvement in wars in terms of economic and human cost were no longer significant hallmarks of the American Way of War. AVF and the use of newer technologies would seemingly yield a new way of war, reducing the need to expose large numbers of young men to the hazards of combat and thereby keeping the popular support needed for US wars to be fought and won. All these transformations, however, did not manage to solve the real issue of the American strategy. This long way the American way of war had taken to first develop into a strategy of annihilation by excellence, and, then, to adapt to face the Cold War new

challenges and, then, to ultimately transmute into a new way of war, ended up leading it back to its point of departure. That point of departure is addressing the inability of American strategy to take into consideration the non-military consequences of its military endeavours. In other words the issue of turning military success into political success remained unresolved. The Gulf War aftermath demonstrated the inadequacy of this new way of war to effectively address the crises it was initially meant to resolve.

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