

Martin VAN CREVELD

The Effectiveness of Military Power¹

The purpose of the present paper is to assess what has been happening to the effectiveness of military power during the last few decades. The paper falls into four parts, 1. nuclear war; 2. conventional war; 3. sub-conventional war as waged by the state against non-state organizations; and 4. sub-conventional war as wage by non-state organizations against state. To these four parts, it is necessary to add the conclusions.

Before starting, a few words about the limits of the subject. First, this paper is intended to assess the effectiveness of war as such. It is not meant to assess its effectiveness in the hands of governments or that, in this region or that, at this moment or that; in other words, we shall try to take as comprehensive, and as global a point of view possible. Given the very large number of wars that has taken place all over the world since 1945, this means that it will always be possible to find some exceptions to the trends here outlined. It is my belief that most of those exceptions are only apparent and that, on closer examination, they will disappear; given the limitations on space that have been set by the organizers of this conference, though, readers will have to excuse me for not trying to conduct that examination on these pages.

Second, our point of departure is 1945. 1945 seems to be a logical choice because it marked the end of the greatest, most ferocious, and most deadly armed conflict ever waged; nothing like it is likely to take place ever again. Enjoying the benefits of hindsight and taking into account, regional variations however, the basic argument of this paper would have been the same if, instead of 1945, 1955, or 1965, or 1975, or 1985, as its starting point. In other words, I believe that the effectiveness of military power is following a trend that first became established in 1945. In spite of all regional variations, as well as many ups and downs, it has continued ever since; therefore it constitutes as reliable a guide to the future as history, that flawed but indispensable crystal ball, may provide.

¹ Martin van Creveld is a professor of History in Jerusalem, specialized in military history and strategy. This paper was written before the events of 11 September 2001 and, except for one sentence, is submitted as written.

Looking back, 6 August 1945 was perhaps the most decisive day in the whole of history. At Hiroshima, the city chosen to fall victim to the drama and later to symbolize it, it was a fine summer day, temperature around 20 degrees. At 1000 o'clock, flying so high that it could only barely be seen by people on the ground, a single heavy bomber appeared. The bomb doors opened and a single bomb was dropped. Straining its engines, the aircraft turned and banked away as fast as it could in order to avoid destruction by its own weapon. Moments later a thousand suns shone, 75,000 people lay dead or dying, and the course of history had been changed forever .

Introduced at the end of the largest armed conflict ever waged; nuclear weapons took a long time before their stultifying effects on future war were realized. During the immediate post-1945 years, only one important author seems to have understood that "the absolute weapons" could never be used²; whether in- or out of uniform, the great majority preferred to look for ways in which the weapon could and, if necessary, would be used³. As always, inertia and the "lessons" of World War II played a part. So long as the number of available nuclear weapons remained limited, their power small compared to what was to come later, and their effects ill-understood, it was possible to believe that they *would* make comparatively little difference. To those who lived during or shortly after World War II the outstanding characteristic of twentieth-Century "total" warfare had been the state's ability to mobilize massive resources and use them for creating equally massive armed forces⁴. Hence it was not unnatural to assume that such resources, minus those destroyed by the occasional atomic bomb dropped on them, would continue to be thrown into combat against each other⁵.

At first possession of nuclear weapons was limited to just one country. However, the "atomic" secret could not be kept for very long and in September 1949 the U.S.S.R. carried out its first test⁶. As more weapons were produced, there were now two states capable of wiping each other off the map. The introduction of hydrogen bombs in 1952-1953 opened up the vision of unlimited destructive power (in practice, the most

² B. Brodie and others, *The Absolute Weapon*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1946, chapter 1, and "The Atom Bomb as Policy Maker", *Foreign Affairs*, 27,1, October 1948, pp. 1-16.

³ The best history of nuclear "strategy" remains L. Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981.

⁴ See e.g. J. F. C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961, p.321

⁵ P. M. S. Blackett, *The Military and Political Consequences of Atomic Energy*, London, Tumstile Press, 1948, chapter 10.

⁶ For the Soviet road to the bomb see most recently David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, New Haven, cr, Yale University Press, 1994.

powerful one built was about three thousand times as large as the one dropped on Hiroshima) and made the prospect of nuclear war even more awful. At the end of World War II there had been just two bombs in existence. Now, however, the age of nuclear plenty arrived with more than enough devices available to "service" any conceivable target⁷. To focus on the U.S., the number of available weapons rose from perhaps less than a hundred in 1950 to some 3,000 in 1960, 10,000 in 1970, and 30,000 in the early 1980s;

when, for lack of suitable targets, growth came to a halt.

Certainly from the time that the U.S.S.R. acquired its first weapons, a "balance of terror"—to use a phrase first popularized by Winston Churchill—was established and could not be upset. This was not for lack of trying. Almost from the beginning, there were numerous attempts to make the world safe for nuclear war. Focusing on the U.S. as the most important and best-documented case of all, these attempts took two forms, conceptual and technological. Conceptual attempts consisted of various doctrines designed to allow the U.S. to use its nuclear power in a "rational" way that would serve some political purpose without necessarily leading to the destruction of the world; from the 1950s to the mid 1980s these "strategies" bore such names as Massive Retaliation, or Limited options, or Flexible Response, or Nuclear Shots Across the Bow, or Decapitation. All were designed to make nuclear war possible by placing limits on it. Looking back, none even remotely succeeded in attaining that objective.

The second way towards making nuclear weapons usable led, or was supposed to lead, through technological innovation. Already in 1946 a Canadian General went on record as saying that a response to the "atomic" weapon was in sight; since then countless attempts have been made to shake the money tree by convincing decision-makers that this was indeed the case and that an "effective" defense could be built. Now the technology in question was called ABM, now BMD, now SDI. Each time billions were spent in producing feasibility studies, developing weapons, and testing them. Each time the effort had to be abandoned. Sometimes this was because of the cost, sometimes because it became clear that, however high the cost, a defense sufficiently robust and sufficiently reliable to make a difference was not in sight; some of the decisions not to deploy such defenses were even written into international

⁷ See A. Enthoven, *How Much is Enough? Shaping the Defense Budget, 1961-69*, New York, Harper & Row, 1971, for the kind of calculation involved.

treaties.

In the meantime, proliferation proceeded apace. First there were two nuclear powers, then four, then five, then eight. Each time another country joined the club dire warnings were sounded—especially in the U.S., which would have liked to retain its monopoly—concerning the effect on world peace⁸. Each time, the opposite happened. Almost no sooner had any country developed its nuclear arsenal than it found that it was less able to engage in military operations against equal, or nearly equal, opponents. This was what happened between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. as well as their respective allies in NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This was what happened between the U.S.S.R. and China, China and India, India and Pakistan, and even in the Middle East where it is now almost three decades since Israel and its neighbors have fought a major war.

Some nuclear countries were large, wealthy and developed, others small, underdeveloped, and/or desperately poor. Some had a large and sophisticated arsenal consisting of thousands upon thousands of hydrogen weapons, others only a few plutonium or uranium bombs. Some had MIRVed ICBMs and SLBMs and cruise missiles to deliver the weapons, others only a few obsolescent fighter bombers. Some had satellites and global communications links to exercise control and assess damage, others only command arrangements so primitive as to make one's hair stand on end.

Some were Christian, others buddhist, others Moslem, others Jewish, others still atheist. Depending on the nature of its opponents, its geo-strategic situation, its resources, and perhaps the idiosyncrasies of its rulers each one developed a more or less explicit, more or less cohesive, doctrine both for deterring a nuclear war and for waging it. Rivers of ink were spilled on what each one could and could not do, might and might to do, with the weapons at its disposal; in the end, though, it did not matter.

At present, attempts to make nuclear weapons usable in war focus on MD, TMD, and their offshoots, including the only system that is currently in some sense "operational", i.e. the Israeli one. More than most of their predecessors, these

⁸ See e.g. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 14, Spring 1950, p. 182 (the Soviet bomb); R.Ducci, « The World Order in the Sixties », *Foreign Affairs*, 43, 3, April 1964, pp. 379-90 (the Chinese bomb); and A. Myrdal, « The High price of Nuclear Arms Monopoly », *Foreign Policy*, 18, Spring 1975, pp. 30-43 (the Indian bomb).

programs appear at least half-way feasible, technologically speaking⁹. No more than any of their predecessors, do they seem capable of providing anything remotely resembling the kind of "absolute" security—whatever that may mean—that would be necessary if nuclear weapons are to be rendered "impotent and obsolete" and if nuclear military power is to be useful in the hands of one country against another that has it.

Since even a country as small as Israel, and even one as underdeveloped as Pakistan, have long proved their ability to build nuclear weapons and acquire delivery vehicles, by definition nuclear military power can be used, if at all, only against countries whose armed forces are so small as to be almost invisible. Unless they are poorer even than Pakistan, and smaller even than Israel, should those countries feel threatened they will undoubtedly embark on a nuclear program of their own and experience suggests that, doing so, they will succeed. The more countries acquire nuclear weapons, the less effective the military power at the disposal of each one as a means for making war against all the rest of the smaller and less important, accordingly, the enemies against which they will still be able to fight. So it has been since 1945, and so, taking due cognizance of the fact that strategy is always a question of probabilities, it will almost certainly be in the foreseeable future.

Since, with few exceptions, the countries in possession of nuclear weapons also tend to be the ones with the largest and most powerful conventional arsenals, it is no wonder that the utility of conventional war has also declined. One way to bring out this fact is with the aid of numbers. Since 1945 the number of states that populate the planet has approximately tripled, from 60 to 180. Had conventional military power still been a useful tool in regulating inter-state relations, then the number of wars ought to have increased by a factor of nine. This, however, did not happen. Border clashes apart, a survey of the period since 1945 only brings to light some 20 inter-state conflicts sufficiently large and dangerous to deserve the appellation war. Putting the median number of states that existed at any one time at 120, the record shows that only about one in five states has been involved in any interstate war whereas four in five have not been. Stretching as it does over more than half a Century, this is not a bad record.

⁹ For a good but non-technical explanation of the mathematics see Dean A. Wilkening, *Ballistic Missile Defence and Strategic Stability*, Adelphi Paper No.334, London, IISS, 2000. This study, incidentally, was written before the failure of the test conducted by the SAP in July 2000.

By previous historical standard, the inter-state wars that did take place were rather small. Gone were the days when, as in 1914-1945, the largest powers on earth mobilized armed forces numbering millions of men and fought against each other over entire continents as well as oceans. Instead, such wars tended to be strictly localized affairs –as their names, e.g. the Korean War, or the Suez Campaign, or the Falkland War, or the Gulf War, testify. Not one of these conflicts ever saw the deployment of armed forces numbering more than a few hundred thousand men on each side. Not one penetrated as much as 200 miles into enemy territory or resulted in permanent territorial change. Though one country, Pakistan, was broken up by means of conventional interstate war, not a single one was wiped off the map by such means. With the result that, in international law, concepts such as "the right of conquest" and "subjugation" have all but disappeared and now have an outlandish ring to them.

What is more, these wars were not evenly distributed over the globe. Of the above-mentioned twenty one, *i.e.* the Falkland War, took place in the South Atlantic. At the rest were fought in just one part of the world; to wit, the vast crescent that starts in West Asia and the Middle East, proceeds through the Horn of Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, and ends in East Asia. This is the area which, almost a hundred years ago, was dubbed "The Rimlands" by British geographer Halford Mackinder. Perhaps more pertinently, this is also the area which, today, harbors many of the states not sufficiently developed to be called "developed" but which are nevertheless sufficiently developed to build nuclear weapons should they want to. Even inside this region the usefulness of conventional military power has been declining since 1973. Outside, it, the same process took root about two and a half decades earlier.

Reflecting their decreasing usefulness, the instruments by which states bring their military power to bear against each other have been declining quite rapidly. To take the example of the largest military power of all, in 1945 the U.S. alone had 12,000,000 men and women under arms. In 2001 fewer than 1,400,000 were left and even they were hard to sustain; notwithstanding the fact that, in the mean time, the population had doubled and the national wealth increased by a factor of perhaps ten. In respect to equipment, the decline has been even greater. 98 American aircraft carriers of all sizes cruised the oceans in 1945, against only 12 today. 100,000 military aircraft were acquired in 1944, against 125—which figures already included

both transports and helicopters—fifty years later¹⁰. America's politicians, strategists, and generals may rant about the world being a dangerous place. They may also claim that military force is as useful—in the hands of enemies of the U.S.—and as necessary—if the U.S. is to resist threats and defend its interests—at the beginning of the twenty first Century as ever before. Judging by their actions, however, they scarcely believe their own words.

What is true in the U.S. is even more true in the world's remaining developed countries. With the exception of those of Russia, which themselves are down to a fraction of what they use to be, the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact hardly exist any longer and are suitable, at best, for internal security. From France to Italy to Germany, those of NATO are being dismantled fast, and already now have been reduced to a small fraction of the size they used to have even as recently as ten years ago. From Australia through New Zealand to Japan the story is the same. At best, if that is the term, the size and quality of the forces is being maintained in the face of ever-growing financial pressures. At worst, if that is the term, those forces are being cut and cut and cut. In most of these countries, so slow has procurement of new weapons become that it is down to a trickle; with the result, incidentally, that the cost of weapon systems has soared and that some of those currently in use are almost as old as Nelson's, flagship was at Trafalgar, i.e. 40 years. In all of them soldiers, instead of fighting or at least training to do so, are writing endless papers and organizing conferences.

If only because there are many more of them, the situation in less developed countries is more complex. Many such countries, particularly those located in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia, simply do not have armed forces capable of being used against their neighbors and are unlikely to acquire such forces in any kind of foreseeable future. A few, such as Israel, South Korea and Taiwan, have very effective forces but, whether because they are nuclear or nuclear-capable or closely allied with a nuclear power, are decreasingly likely to use them against other states. Others, such as Turkey, the main Arab States, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and China still maintain fairly large armed forces. Often, though, those forces are needed as much for maintaining internal order as for making war against their

¹⁰ World War II figures are from Richard Overy, *The Air War, 1939-1945*, London: Europa, 1980, p. 308-9; 1995 ones from Don M. Snider, "The Coming Defense Train Wreck", *Washington Quarterly*, 19, 1, Winter 1996, p. 92.

neighbors. As the Chinese attack on Vietnam (1979) and the more recent "Kargil War" e.g. showed¹¹, in the latter capacity they are only moderately effective; though islands of modernity do exist, on the whole the equipment at their disposal is obsolescent at best. Several of the countries in question have already built nuclear weapons, tested them, and deployed them. From Egypt through Turkey to Iran to South Korea, others are quite capable of doing so at relatively short notice and will surely do so if they feel threatened. Hence, in spite of the considerable variation they display, among them too the prevailing trend is towards smaller, read less useful, armed forces.

Before bidding good-bye to the world of inter-state war, a word about "military modernization". In the eyes of many, the above-mentioned process by which the armed forces of developed countries are being cut and cut is part of an ongoing shift from low-tech to high-tech and from quantity to quality; in other words, a necessary and even welcome part of military progress. I disagree. In most cases, the more powerful tanks, guns, aircraft, missiles, guns, ships, etc. still being acquired, or produced, or developed, or designed, or at least talked about, will not enhance the ability of those who possess them to deploy and use military power.

On the contrary: partly because of the vast expense that they involve, partly because they are useful only against other of the same kind, the development of such powerful weapons its itself a typical sign of decay.

Historical precedents that come to mind in this context are the Hellenistic war-galleys with their multiple rows or oars, most of which ended up being captured by the Romans; the late medieval knight whose armor was so expensive that he armed forces he finally disappeared; and the early twentieth-Century battleship¹². The late acquire such twentieth- Century heavy bomber (the few that still remain) is another point in case, given that it can only be used against countries so small and so backward as to be unable to produce nuclear weapons. Far from making military power more usable, each of these weapons in turn served as an indication that it was coming to an end

Whereas, since 1945, there have been no nuclear wars and comparatively few major inter-state ones, the number of sub-conventional conflicts was at least one hundred.

¹¹ See J. Singh, "The Fourth War", in J. Singh (ed.), *Kargill 1999, Pakistan 's Fourth War for Kashmir*, New Delhi, Knowledge, 1999, pp. 118-43.

¹² See, on them, Martin van Creveld, *Technology and War: From 2000 B.C. to the Present*, New York,

Some of these conflicts were conducted by states against non-state organizations, and will be discussed in this section. Others were conducted by non-state organizations against states, and will be discussed in the next. Others still were conducted by non-state organizations against each other. Of the three, this is the type least likely to affect developed countries, Japan included. Which is why it is not discussed in the present paper.

Beginning in 1941, which was when the German overran Yugoslavia in a Blitzkrieg campaign, the record of regular armed forces –those belonging to developed countries *and* those belonging to less developed ones– has been a word about disastrous. The Germans themselves, along with their allies, deployed almost thirty divisions in the Balkans¹³; not only did they not succeed in putting down the uprising, but in the end they were forced out by Tito's partisans. The performance of the Wehrmacht against the Soviet partisans was scarcely better. Though there were certainly variations from one country to another—in particular, Denmark remained more or less peaceful almost to the end—on the whole longer the occupation lasted the greater the resistance. Towards the end of the War much of Western Europe—to say nothing of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Italy—was in flames. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which, albeit at immense cost, Europe would have ended up by liberating self from the Nazis even without assistance from the Allied Powers.

Perhaps the lesson from these events ought to have been that movements of national liberation, employing terrorism and guerrilla as their instruments, are all but impossible to put down even by such brutal measures as the Japanese and Germans employed. Those who should have learnt that lesson refused to do so, though, with the result that their countries and armed forces spend the next decades going from one defeat to the next. The British were among the first to suffer, being thrown out of Palestine by the Jewish terrorist organizations such as Hagana, ETSEL, and LECHI. The Dutch lost Indonesia, the French first Indochina and then Algeria (after which they more or less gave up). The British tried to hold on to Malaysia, Kenya, Cyprus and Aden, all to no avail. The Americans, hoping to succeed where the supposedly demoralized Europeans had failed, went to Vietnam and ended by running away

N.Y., Free Press, 1989, pp. 287-88.

¹³ See, for the precise order of battle, M.F. Cancian, « The Wehrmacht in Yugoslavia: Lessons of the Past? », *Parameters*, 21, 3, autumn 1993, p. 78.

while hanging from their helicopters. Nor were Western Imperialist countries the only ones to learn that using armed force in order to fight non-state organizations constitutes an almost fool-proof recipe for disaster. To mention but a few, neither the Egyptians in Yemen, nor the Soviets in Afghanistan, nor the Indians in Sri Lanka, nor the Vietnamese in Cambodia, nor the Indonesians in East Timor, nor the Israelis in Lebanon, were Western Imperialists. Yet all undertook similar wars, and all suffered a similar fate.

Of the armed forces that undertook the above-mentioned counterinsurgency operations, none was particularly tender-hearted and several operated on such a scale as to approach genocide. The operations of the Japanese in South-East Asia, and even more so those of the Germans in occupied Europe, are notorious for the brutality that they involved and the number of dead they left behind. The British at peak deployed 100,000 troops against 600,000 Jews in Palestine, the French 400,000 against 8,000,000 Algerians, to no avail. The Americans in Vietnam deployed over two million men (the maximum number in the country at any one time was about 550,000). They spent 150,000,000,000 dollars, dropped six million tons of bombs, turned entire districts into wasteland, and lost 1,500 helicopters, all to no avail. Most of these forces used practically every weapon at their disposal, from heavy bombers to supersonic fighters and helicopters and from aircraft carriers to tanks, artillery, people sniffers, defoliants, and poison gas. Deploying every weapon at their disposal and developing immense firepower, not seldom the number of casualties they inflicted on their opponents ran into the hundreds of thousands and even the millions, also to no avail.

The reasons why, since 1941, modern, regular, state-owned armed forces have done so poorly against opponents who, in many cases, were so puny that they could barely even be counted will be touched on briefly in the next section. Meanwhile it is worth noting that the wars in question have given rise to an enormous literature. Much of it was written by those who were responsible for or at least involved in, losing them; indeed the term Low Intensity Conflict itself was invented in 1967 by a British officer who, as a reward for having participated in several of them, found himself in charge of the Camberley Staff College¹⁴. Such being their background,

¹⁴ See Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, London, Faber & Faber, 1971. Others who wrote about LIC after having helped lose it include Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*, New York, N.Y., Free Press, 1977, and Jacques Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, London, Pall Mall, 1964.

perhaps it is no wonder few if any of them refused to confront the real causes behind their defeats. Instead, from General Westmoreland¹⁵ down, they presented any number of excuses: from faulty strategy to meddling by the media and from lack of interagency coordination to personnel turbulence¹⁶. Putting one's head in the sand, however, seldom does anybody any good. So long as most people refuse to confront the truth, and unless conditions are exceptionally favorable in continuing to involve themselves in wars against terrorism and guerrilla they can expect to suffer further defeats.

To conclude this section, the military power of the state seems to have and lost most of its usefulness not only in nuclear war, or in conventional inter-state war, but also, and perhaps more than anywhere else, in the kind of war that is waged against non-state organizations. Politicians and generals may issue vehement denials; the fact that, in June 2001, a mere hint that Ossama Bin Ladin might attempt something caused hundreds of U.S. Marines to be evacuated from Jordan and some of the most advanced, most powerful, most expensive warships ever built to scuttle to sea¹⁷ speaks for itself. No number of lame excuses will change this ominous fact. Instead, after half a Century of almost continuous defeats, perhaps it is time for those who have ears to listen to listen.

War waged by a non-state organization against the state is in many ways a mirror of war as waged by a state against its non-state opponent. To this extent as of the beginning of the twenty first Century the former has become by far the most useful form of military power still left on this planet. While it would be untrue to say that every guerrilla and terrorist campaign necessarily succeeds, it certainly is true that, over the last half Century, this kind of war has booked far more successes than any other. Doing so it has led to dozens of new countries being created and enabled billions of people to change the regimes under which they lived; conversely, it also caused the collapse of some of the largest, most powerful, empires that ever existed or are likely to exist.

Almost by definition, most campaigns of this kind were launched by organizations so small, so weak, so poor and so lacking in weapons of every kind as to be almost invisible. Following Mao's doctrine of the "Three Stages" some were able to expand

¹⁵ *Soldier Reports*, New York, N.Y., Dell, 1972, particularly pp. 538-62.

¹⁶ On that truth, as understood by this author, see M. van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York, N.Y., Free Press, 1991, chapter 6.

their size and operations until they turned themselves into regular armies. However, many remained very small almost to the end and probably none was ever able to match the resources that the regular state-owned, forces brought to bear against it. For example, the Mujahedin in Afghanistan never even learnt to operate on a scale larger than a battalion and essentially always remained a ragtag force of semi-trained light infantryman. Hezbollah in Lebanon faced forces equivalent to an Israeli infantry division plus all the resources of the Israeli Air Force and Navy; yet apparently never at any one time did the number of active guerrillas exceed 500 or so. In other words, the balance of forces cannot be held responsible for the defeats that the counterinsurgents suffered. This is even true when, as was the case in Afghanistan, they possess a supply of modern weapons; given that numerous other cases show that possession of such weapons by no means constitutes a sine qua non for success.

Rather than the countless excuses that have been adduced, the real reasons for the repeated ability of non-state organizations to defeat even the largest, best equipped, armed forces are moral. To fight an opponent who is much weaker than oneself is no fun; as Friedrich Nietzsche, not known as a military expert but perhaps the most perceptive philosopher who ever lived, once wrote, nothing is more boring than a victory forever repeated. For him who is strong, even a victory over the weak constitutes a defeat. For him who is weak, a defeat by the strong constitutes a triumph. Moreover, war by definition is a two sided activity in which the belligerents imitate each other and, over time, become like each other. Thus, and unless he can finish the business quickly by a single blow, he who fights against the weak will end up by becoming weak himself; he who fights against the strong will end up by becoming strong.

Given that more has been written about the War in Vietnam than about any other conflict of this kind, it provides a good illustration of the way things works¹⁸. At the outset of U.S. involvement, say 1960-1963, so great was the discrepancy between the resources and power of both sides that it could barely even be expressed in percentage-points. Later, pouring troops and weapons into the country, the U.S. armed forces killed so many people claimed to be hostile that they could no longer

¹⁷ CNN, 23.6.01.

¹⁸ See R.A. Gabriel and L. Savage, *Crisis in Command*, New York, N.Y., Hill & Wang, for the most extensive documentation.

even be counted. Killing people did not, however, bring the Americans any closer to victory. On the contrary, and precisely because the enemy was much too weak to present any kind of threat-of the U.S., doing so soon began to be perceived as immoral and the more brutal the means used the more true this became. Though there may be some argument as to who came first, both the public at home and the troops were affected. The former, who had initially been almost united in their support for the war, reacted by setting up a growing peace-movement and by refusing to serve in the armed forces when the call came. The latter deserted or went A WOL. They also took drugs, refused their orders, fragged those of their office who dared to insist on discipline, and, from time to time, vented their frustration upon the hapless Vietnamese.

The more they vented their frustration the more they had to hide their crimes, as at My Lai. The more they tried to hide their crimes, the more even activities that were not criminal began to be perceived as such. The outcome was a collapse of mutual confidence. This, in turn caused the chain of command to be undermined as subordinates no longer told the truth to their superiors and as superiors based their orders on the false reports they received. Needless to say, the other side also committed atrocities. Being weak, however, it could justify them in the name of necessity; which, as is well known, has no bounds. The proof is this pudding is in the eating. The longer the war and the more intense the war that Viet Cong and North Vietnam waged, the greater the support they got; as for the U.S., things worked the other way around.

Nor are the processes that have just been outlined unique to the Americans in Vietnam. Depending on circumstances, to one extent or another they will affect any force that is engaged in an asymmetrical conflict of this kind but fails to end it fairly quickly; though some swords are clearly more resistant than others, in the end any sword that is plunged into salt water will rust. Those leaders who have not yet learnt this lesson had better take it to heart. Or else, as happened to Mikhail Gorbachov in 1990, when the time comes they may find themselves without any kind of sword at all.

In the early years of the twenty first Century, and especially in comparison with the years before 1945, the final balance of all this ought to be clear to anybody who does not deliberately shut his eyes. In spite of the various countermeasures currently being proposed, planned, developed, manufactured, tested or deployed, no fool-proof

defense against nuclear forces is in sight. As a result, the usefulness for war-making purposes of those forces is as low today as at any time since Nagasaki; as additional countries join the nuclear club or give decisive proof of their ability to do so at short notice, it is likely to decline still further. In spite of the modernization that is still going on in some places, and mainly because any country sufficiently developed to build strong conventional forces will also be able to get its hands on nuclear weapons, the usefulness for war-making purposes of conventional forces is also declining. The third kind of military power, i.e. that which is used by states against other organizations, is the most useless of all. Over the last half Century or so, almost all campaigns of this kind have ended in failure; and indeed so abysmal is the record that those who do not see it deserve to be accused of willful, not to say criminal, ignorance.

Of the four kinds of war discussed in this paper only one retains its usefulness. Especially in comparison to the period before 1945, the signs are that its usefulness is growing¹⁹. To be sure, not all post-1945 uprisings, insurrections, terrorists campaigns, guerrilla wars, sub-conventional and low intensity conflicts, or whatever they may be called gain their ends by yielding political results. On the other hand, and compared to other three types, their prospect of doing so are much better and indeed in many cases the defeat of those who try to counter them appears an almost foregone conclusion. The events of 9/11 have served as a rude reminder of us what can happen to those who put their heads in the sand. Should political and military leaders all over the world fail to take care of the kind of war in question, it may well end up by taking care of them.

¹⁹ See on this, most recently, R.J. Bunker and J.P. Sullivan, « Cartel Evolution : Potentials and Consequences », *Transnational Organization*, 4, 2, summer 1998, pp. 55-74.