THE CHANGING FACE OF WAR

COMBAT FROM THE MARNE TO IRAQ

MARTIN VAN CREVELD

BALLANTINE BOOKS

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Mevasseret Zion,
October 4, 2005

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Introduction

A s of the opening years of the twenty-first century, the mightiest, richest, best-equipped, best-trained armed forces that have ever existed are in full decline and are, indeed, looking into Examples of their failure abound. Almost forgotten are the days when the Israelis had fought against, and triumphed over, all the armed forces of all the Arab countries combined. Instead, having spent seventeen years vainly trying to put down the Palestinian uprising, the Israelis are even now giving up and retreating from Gaza and parts of the West Bank—to be followed, no doubt, by most of the rest. Other armed forces find themselves in a similar plight. Having spent ten years fighting in Chechnya, thoroughly demolished the capital of Grozny, and killed, injured, and "dehoused" tens if not hundreds of thousands of their opponents, the Russians are still unable to pacify that country of two and a half million. In Thailand, in Indonesia, in the Philippines, in a dozen other countries, regular armed forces are engaged in so-called counterinsurgency operations. In terms of sheer military power, all are far stronger than their enemies. None, however, seems to be making any considerable headway, and most will probably end up in defeat.

Particularly disturbing is the case of the Americans in Iraq. Whether the American decision to attack Saddam Hussein was justified will not be considered here. Suffice it to say that the United States, as the world's sole superpower, has the most powerful forces by far, with technology at its disposal that hardly any other country can match. The chosen enemy was a small third-world country with a gross domestic product so much smaller than its own that comparisons were meaningless. Twelve years earlier, that country had already lost two-thirds of its armed forces. The remainder, it soon turned out, consisted of ill-trained, unwilling levies driving a few rusting hulks. Instead of getting their aircraft into the skies, they buried them in the sand; instead of fighting, they threw down their weapons and went home. Yet no sooner had "major combat operations"—to quote President Bush's victory speech—ended than it became clear that the US forces, which had taken only three weeks to occupy a country of 240,000 square miles and capture its capital, were unable to deal with a few thousand terrorists. In early 2005, having lost ten times as many troops to those terrorists as they did during the war itself, they were still floundering. So weak had their position become that their opponents hardly bothered to shoot at them any longer. Instead, preparing for the day after the inevitable American withdrawal, the terrorists were focusing on their own countrymen.

To understand the present, study the past. Where did twentieth-century warfare come from? How did it develop from its nineteenth-century predecessor? How did it reach the point at which, at one time, the forces that waged it were capable of overrunning entire continents? When did those forces peak, why did they start to decline, and how did they reach the present impasse? Is there a way out, or are regular, state-owned armed forces forever doomed to go on losing to what are often small groups of bedraggled, ill-organized terrorists? The present volume, consisting of a short history of war over the last century or so, is an attempt to answer these questions.

In tackling this subject, perhaps the most difficult problem is deciding what to include and what to leave out.[1] Obviously any attempt to tell the story of twentieth-century warfare without reference to the political, economic, technological, and social background is as impossible, say, as describing a chameleon without taking into account the environment in which it lives. Obviously, too, any volume that tries to do all this will grow to monumental dimensions. I tried to compromise, providing enough background material to make the wars, campaigns, and battles about which I write comprehensible, but without denying military operations the center stage to which they, if the above-listed questions are to be answered, are entitled.

Another difficulty in writing about the subject at hand was that the number of available sources is practically unlimited; which, given that the library of my alma mater in Jerusalem is buying fewer and fewer books, was actually one very good reason for preferring that subject to many others. I hope I can convince people that, in addition to doing my homework and providing a brief synthesis, I do have some original things to say. Yet I did not think it necessary to read every volume produced by others or document every word I wrote. Had I tried to do so, then of course the task would never have been finished either in my lifetime or, much worse, that of my readers.

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Prelude, 1900-14

I.I. States, Armies, and Navies

Around 1900, the idea that the only possible threat to a "Great Power" could com[e] from another "Great Power" was taken very much for granted. Indeed, nowhere [in] the voluminous strategic literature of the period is any other possibility so much a[s] hinted at. Depending on whether or not one included Italy, the number of Great Powers wa[s] either seven or eight. Of them, no fewer than six (or seven) were populated almost entire[ly] by Christian people of Caucasian stock—an extraordinary fact, considering that such peop[le] formed a small percentage of the world's population. Even more extraordinary, of the seve[n] (or eight) Great Powers in question, four (or five) were located in just one, rather smal[l] continent by the name of Europe. Another, Russia, had its main basis firmly rooted in th[at] continent even though it also stretched all the way across Asia to the Pacific. Only two of th[e] powers, the United States and Japan, were geographically separated from the "old" continen[t.] However, even those two owed their strength either to the fact that their population was [of] Caucasian stock or to their successful adaptation of European ideas, methods, and technique[s.]

The product of a series of exceptionally fortunate circumstances,[1] built up over the cours[e] of centuries, this tremendous concentration of military might enabled its owners to sha[re] almost the entire world among themselves. From about **AD** 1500 on, it was Europe th[at] established colonies abroad, not the other way around. European ships were fully rigged a[nd] carried row upon row of cannon. Captained by the likes of Christopher Columbus, Vasco [da] Gama, and their followers, they reached the four corners of the earth. Wherever they m[et] opposition they shot it to pieces; meanwhile, non-Europeans were able to reach Europe, if [at] all, only as licensed curiosities.[2]

In addition to Latin America, the only non-European countries that succeeded in stayi[ng] independent were China, Thailand, Ethiopia, Liberia, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, a[nd] Afghanistan. The main reason why they did so was not their own strength but because th[e] powers, while unable to agree on how to carve them up, did not want to go to war ov[er] them. Some were formally designated as buffer zones. Thus, Iran in 1907 was cut into thr[ee] "zones of influence": a Russian one in the north, a British one in the south, and a commo[n] one in the center. In other cases, the independence in question was more apparent than real.

As so often happens, political power rested on an equally impressive accumulation [of] economic muscle. The Industrial Revolution had started in Britain during the second half [of] the eighteenth century. From there, it spread to the Continent; as of the beginning of th[e] twentieth century, however, with the exception of the United States and Japan it had scarce[ly]

yet touched the other parts of the globe. Until 1750, according to the best available calculations, about three-quarters of all the world's manufacturing output had been concentrated in what, today, we would call the third world (Africa and Asia minus Russia and Japan). From this point, the share underwent a steady decline until, in 1900, it stood at a mere 12 percent. Conversely, by that time, Europe, the United States, and Japan together accounted for no less than 88 percent of world manufacturing output. In terms of per capita industrialization, the gap between the self-styled "civilized" and "primitive" countries was much greater still.

In 1914, on the eve of the Great War, the largest economic power was already the United States, with a population of 98 million and a national income of $37 billion. It was followed by Germany (65 million and $12 billion, respectively), Great Britain (45 and $11), Russia (171 and $7), France (39 and $6), Austria-Hungary (52 and $3), Italy (37 and $4), and Japan (55 and $2). Thus the US economy was slightly larger than those of the next four powers combined, amounting to no less than 45 percent of the total. At $377, American per capita income was also the highest by far—one result of this being that visitors to America who had been comfortable at home felt like paupers. It was followed, at a considerable distance, by Britain ($244), Germany ($184), and France ($153). On that basis, the poorest powers of all were Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Japan, in that order.[3]

At that time, five out of the world's seven most powerful armed forces, namely those of Germany, France, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, relied on some form of general conscription to fill their manpower needs. So did Japan, although in practice the country's financial penury meant that the fraction of the relevant age groups which actually saw service was much smaller. The important exceptions were Britain, whose main defense consisted of its navy, and the United States, which, feeling secure behind its oceans, hardly had an army at all.

Conscription, organized by the magistrates with the aid of pre-prepared lists of citizens, had been the normal method for obtaining military manpower both in classical Greece and during the Roman Republic. However, in the days of the empire it was abandoned, and before it was reinstituted, more than a millennium and a half had to pass. Assisted by advances in public administration, the first modern country to resort to conscription, or the *levee en masse* as it was called, was France in 1792. Other countries reluctantly followed, though not without many ups and downs that, often reflecting political battles among reactionaries, democrats, and socialists, lasted during most of the nineteenth century.[4]

Following the German triumph over France in 1870–71, most countries adopted the system of military organization developed by the victor. This system divided the armed forces into three parts. The first consisted of a core of professionals (officers and NCOs) who served on longtime contracts—in many cases, until retirement. The second was made up of a large group of conscripts who, depending on the country in question and also on the service they joined, were usually made to serve two or three years. The two elements together might make up perhaps 1 percent of a country's population in peacetime, though in the case of France it was rather more and in those of Italy and Japan, rather less.

The third and largest part consisted of reservists who had completed their training and, having been discharged into civilian life and perhaps undergone refresher training from time

to time, remained available for immediate recall in case war broke out.

By 1914, most countries expected reserves to increase their armed forces by a factor
four or five, but that did not prove the upper limit. The best-organized countries with th
shortest lines of communications were Germany and France. Ultimately, they put almost 1
percent of their entire populations in uniform and kept them for years on end; what th
meant for them, and their families, we can hardly imagine.

While every Great Power, as well as most of the lesser nations, possessed both an arm
and a navy, most land and naval forces had developed separately over a period of centurie
As a result, few people thought of providing them with common training at any level, le
alone of putting them under joint command. Instead, each service had its own ministr
responsible for providing it with weapons, cannon fodder, fuel, and administrative support
everything from financial affairs to veterans' pensions. Each ministry was headed by
minister or secretary who represented it either in the cabinet or, in Britain and France, in
smaller committee consisting of key ministers.

In Germany, the only link between the OHL (Oberste Heeresleitung) and the SK
(Seekriegsleitung) was the kaiser himself, as commander in chief. Consequently, the SKL wa
not officially informed about the army's plans. Nor, according to one of its subsequer
commanders in chief, Admiral Erich Raeder, had it prepared any plans for assisting in th
invasion of Belgium and France.[5] And matters differed little in the United States. There, to
the secretary of the navy and the secretary of war (army) were insulated from each othe
each answering only to the president. Beneath them, the army chief of staff and the chief
naval operations appeared to live on separate planets, a problem that, as far as procedure
signal communications, and data links are concerned, has not been completely solved to th
present day. France and Britain faced the same organizational limitations, only this time th
role of the missing link was played by their respective prime ministers. In effect the ma
difference between the military monarchies east of the Rhine and the democracies west of
was that, in the former, the chiefs of staff were entitled to address a sovereign directly. Th
Immediatvortrag, as the Germans called it, was nevertheless far from ideally suited for th
demands of modern war to come. Yet it was only after 1945 that most countries attempte
reform, setting up unified ministries of defense with a common high command for a
services. By then, as we shall see, in some ways it no longer mattered.

As had been the case at least since Gustavus Adolphus showed the way early in th
seventeenth century, armies still consisted essentially of the three arms of infantry, cavalr
and artillery. However, the proliferation since 1870 of magazine-loading small arms, machir
guns, and quick-firing cannon was showing those with eyes to see that the days of the caval
charge were numbered. Perhaps even more importantly in retrospect, extremely rap
technical progress during the second half of the nineteenth century had resulted in armi
becoming much more articulated, leading to the creation of a host of specialist uni
responsible for operating the new devices. Many were offshoots of the artillery, long know
as a refuge for officers who were less anti-intellectual than the rest. Among them wer
engineering troops, technical troops, railway troops, signal troops—soon to branch into th
various flying corps—and the like; the days when 90 percent of all troops carried weapor
and were expected to fight as their primary mission were coming to an end.

The first experiments in carrying troops by rail had been made in Russia as far back as the 1840s. In 1859, both the French and the Prussians used the method, the former to wage war against the Austrians in Italy and the latter to deploy their army on the Rhine. These early exercises were dwarfed by the American Civil War when both sides, but the Federals in particular, used railroads on a gigantic scale to shuttle men and supplies to and fro across the continent. However, this fact left most European observers, who were convinced of their own superiority, unmoved. Not everybody was as perceptive as Karl Marx, who, though no military expert, saw the Americans' war as "a spectacle without parallel" in history.[6] Yet it must be admitted that there was some reason behind the indifference. In 1866 and 1870–71 the Prussians gave a dazzling demonstration of what railways could do, and from then until 1914, almost invariably it was American officers who came to study German methods, not the other way around.

By 1914, the great age of railway construction was all but over. With two hundred thousand miles of track crisscrossing Europe, all powers planned on making maximum use of the lines in order to carry out mobilization and deployment. For example, the German general staff planned on operating no fewer than eleven thousand trains over a period of two weeks. Proceeding at a stately twenty-five miles per hour, their movements were calculated so precisely that even the number of axles passing over a given bridge within a given period of time was known. Then as now, in terms of carrying capacity and sheer efficiency the railways had no rival, requiring far fewer personnel and maintenance per ton/mile transported. Then as now, however, they were also inflexible and, in times of war, vulnerable to enemy action.

Moreover, railways could not be built too close to the front; as a result, many operations still had to be carried out on the backs of men and animals. A mode of transportation that the First World War did not share with any previous conflict was the automobile. In 1914, the mobilized German army had about five thousand of them, mostly impressed civilian vehicles that were unsuited to the harsh demands of war. By contrast, the number of horses used to carry cavalrymen, haul the artillery, and drag the supply wagons was estimated at 1 million.[7]

The newfangled contraptions did prove useful, however, in a famous episode that took place in September of that year. General Gal-lieni, who serving as military governor of Paris, requisitioned six hundred of the city's taxis to move troops to the front, allegedly making a substantial contribution to the French victory at the battle of the Marne.

As the First World War hammered on, automobiles became more common and were increasingly used for liaison, casualty evacuation, supply, and the like. Other vehicles, in the form of tractors, were also used to haul pieces of artillery so heavy that they could never have been moved by any other means. By 1918, the British army alone had about seventy thousand of them, including both passenger cars and trucks. Still, experience was to show that a fully motorized army needed one vehicle for every six men—a figure remarkably similar to the previous ratio of horses to men, and not even the Americans, who were much better equipped than anybody else, were able to approach it. Partly for that reason, partly because battlefields were often too difficult for mechanized transport, all major operations continued to depend, as they had for centuries, on the muscles of men and horses.[8]

If war is the father of invention, then the field of command, control, and communication had long been its unloved stepchild. Thanks to its muskets and cannon, Napoleon's grande armee could easily have smashed Caesar's legions, yet as Napoleon himself wrote, he held n significant advantage in his ability to communicate with his generals. In **AD** 1800 as in 44 **BC** communications were moved by men, either on foot or on horseback. For short-range wor messages could be conveyed aurally by drums or trumpets, or visually by flags and standard For longer ranges, Napoleon did have uniquely at his disposal: the semaphore system. Th semaphore consisted of moveable beams mounted on top of tall towers so as to form variou combinations, indicating letters, which could be read from afar by means of a telescop Initially there was only one line; later, the system was expanded until it linked all of the mo important capital cities.[9] Owing to the need for numerous operators and observers, howeve it was enormously expensive to operate. It was also fixed in place, which meant that it wa unable to follow the movements of field armies.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, these age-old methods began to be supplemente by the offsprings of the new wonder of science: electricity. In the form of the telegraph, th telephone, and radio, technical progress was rapid, although by 1914 all three remaine cumbersome, fragile, or both, and all of course depended on electrical power—which was n always available. As a result, the closer to the front one got, the scarcer were these high-te marvels and the greater the use of the older, but more reliable runners, blinking ligh (including rockets), klaxons, homing pigeons (discarded by the US Army only in the 1930s and even messenger dogs.

Technological developments changed the battlefield, more or less, but it was at sea whe the dramatic advances took place. The early years of the twentieth century caught the world major navies in the midst of a major transition toward far larger and more powerful, but als more expensive and hence fewer, battleships. During the 1860s, first ironclads (sheets of ir plate over a wooden hull) and then iron-built ships had begun to take the place of the o wooden, sail-driven vessels, and in 1873, the HMS *Devastation* became the first battleship abandon sails altogether, relying completely on coal for motive power.

By 1914, the shift from sail to coal was more or less complete. Freed from the vagaries weather, ships were now faster, larger, more heavily armed and armored than ever. Coa unlike wind, was exhaustible, and the need for refueling stations throughout the wor authored a new chapter in the West's competition for overseas colonies. But coal, too, wa being replaced by oil and reciprocating steam engines by the much more efficient turbines. 1906 the British *Dreadnought,* the first all big-gun battleship was launched. It made all i predecessors obsolete at a stroke, compelling the other powers to follow suit.

As late as 1880, the range of naval guns was limited to three thousand yards. The crew aimed their weapons as best they could. They followed the roll of the vessel and let fly what they hoped was the right moment; then they corrected by observing the splashes. E 1914, guns could throw shells up to thirty thousand yards, much too far away to allow gu crews to even see their target—so finding a new system to aim and track naval gunfi became imperative. Between 1900 and 1910, British and American officers did in fact put place a system that made use of recently developed mechanical direction finders and rang finders. These instruments passed their data to the chief artillery officer, who now becam

the third most important person aboard, after the captain and the executive officer. Perche
high on the bridge— higher, in fact, than the captain, who had to content himself with th
level below—he and his staff used mechanical devices to make the necessary calculation
while compensating for such factors as relative speed, direction, and roll. When the momen
came, it was he who pressed the firing button, sending an electrical discharge to deliver
salvo.(tm)[10]

At a time when some military wireless stations on land were still powered by soldie
furiously pedaling stationary bicycles to turn generators, electrical energy was much mo
readily available at sea. There, engines that could be made to drive a dynamo wer
omnipresent. In 1905, Japanese scouts used radio in order to warn their commander in chie
Admiral Heichachiro Togo, that the Russian fleet was approaching the Tsushima Strait;[11]
1910, every single British vessel, military or civilian, was ordered to install a set.

For the first time in history, central headquarters, instead of issuing their admirals wi
letters of instruction that might or might not fit circumstances and might or might not b
obeyed, was in a position to continuously monitor operations and control them. For the fir
time in history, messages could be sent in many directions at once without additional expens
and, if in code, without entailing the risk that the craft that carried the orders would fall in
enemy hands. Widely separated vessels and fleets could execute a coherent strateg
coordinate their movements, and come to one another's aid as circumstances dictated;[12] th
impact of factors that used to interfere with earlier, optically based signaling systems such a
fog and darkness, the position of the sun, or even the smoke from the ships' own stacks wer
all but eliminated.

At sea as on land, the flip side of this coin was that radio transmissions could b
intercepted and, not infrequently, decrypted. Even if the transmissions could not b
decrypted, the very fact that they were broadcast, their number, and the possibility of usin
triangulation in order to track them to their place of origin frequently provided importar
clues as to the whereabouts of enemy fleets, their strength, and their intentions. This wa
apparent even to Admiral Togo in 1905; once he had received the critical message warnir
him of the Russians' approach, he ordered his captains to observe radio silence as the
prepared for battle. Conversely, in 1916 the first indication that the German high sea flee
had sailed toward what would develop into the battle of Jutland reached the British in th
form of intercepted radio calling signals—albeit an administrative muddle at the admiral
prevented them from using that information as well as they might have.

Finally, yet another new technology with the potential to revolutionize naval warfare wa
the submarine. Submarines had a long history going back to the end of the seventeen
century, and a few of them had actually been used during the American Civil War. Howeve
those early models proved as dangerous to their crews as to their enemies; it was only
1900 that the first modern submarine, combining an internal combustion engine with a
electric motor for underwater movement, was launched. An American invention, this bas
design soon found imitators, but progress was slow. When the war broke out, submarine
were still untried in battle, and their true potential was unknown; even the most astute nav
writer of the time, Julian Corbett, thought they would be useful mainly for coastal defense.
With so many different new technologies emerging at sea, few people had a clear idea ho

they would interact and how they should be used, or what their impact would be.

1.2. Visions of War

In 1914, the uniformed military claimed a near monopoly on all things martial. It is tru[e] that the media of the day did take a lively interest in military science, but the idea of civilia[n] think tanks and civilian university departments teaching courses on the subject remained f[ar] away. Nor did any country as yet think it necessary to have a national security council with[ ] strong representation of civilian experts; indeed, the German great general staff referred t[o] the foreign ministry, which might have provided some such experts, as *das Idiotenhau[s]*. Though there were a few exceptions, notably in the United States and France, where th[e] government did not entirely trust the brass, in most countries the ministers responsible f[or] their respective war departments were themselves former generals or admirals.

In all countries, the real experts on military science were the general staff officers, the[ir] status clearly marked by red stripes running down their pants, and the only place whe[re] military science was taught was at the staff colleges. Such institutions originated in the la[st] years of the eighteenth century, and until the middle of the nineteenth century had bee[n] fairly obscure. However, the German wars against Austria and France (1866–71) changed th[e] situation. While general staffs became the sole founts of military wisdom, staff colleges we[re] the places where members of the elite were put through their paces; the importance of th[e] role they played is suggested by the fact that key future French commanders such a[s] Ferdinand Foch and Philippe Petain, and their German counterparts Paul von Hindenburg an[d] Erich Luden-dorff, spent time teaching in them.

On the minus side, the system created a near-complete divorce between the military an[d] civilian worlds—a divorce also reflected in the writing of military history, which tended to b[e] extremely parochial. Thus the first sea lord and effective chief of staff of the British navy[,] Admiral John Fisher, at one point brought over Julian Corbett to lecture at the new[ly] established Greenwich Staff College. Corbett at the time was the world's best-known nav[al] theorist after Alfred Mahan, and though few people (other than Winston Churchill) actual[ly] read his work, most agreed that it was brilliant. One of the cardinal points he tried to p[ut] across was that, to understand naval affairs, it was not enough to know about ships, engine[s,] cannon, tides, weather conditions, and the like. Instead, one had to refer to "the whole are[a] of diplomatic and military effort"; today we might call this grand strategy. He was not [a] success, and the students, crusty sea dogs all of them, poked "good-natured" fun at h[is] attempts to explain the actions of past naval commanders and criticize them. After all, b[y] profession he was a lawyer, albeit one who, possessing independent means, studied nav[al] affairs full time. And what could a lawyer know that they did not know already?[14]

Turning from the hostility of the staff colleges, the war ministries were sometimes mo[re] receptive to new ideas. Spenser Wilkinson in 1895, published his treatise on the ideas th[at] underpinned the German general staff, just at the time when the duke of Cambridge—who a[s] commander in chief had been blocking all change for decades—finally left office.'[15] Sti[ll]

most civilians—including the best-known military historian of the day, the German professo[r] Hans Delbrueck—were contemptuously rejected. Indeed, Delbrueck's attempt to put militar[y] history "within the framework of political history" (the subtitle of his main book) was itse[lf] enough to arouse suspicion.'[16] Hadn't the military always insisted that the profession wa[s] separate from, and more important than, any mere political developments? A few specialist[s] such as doctors and priests, received direct commissions after having attended civilia[n] universities or schools. Apart from that, the possibility that serving officers might hav[e] anything to learn by doing so was simply inconceivable.

At the time, there were a number of recent conflicts to which those who wished could loo[k] for lessons. Never, incidentally, had the status of military history as a source of such lesson[s] been higher. Given that the combatants on at least one side were considered barely huma[n,] the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 seemed to provide few lessons, but the Boer War of 1899[–] 1900 was a different matter.'[17] This war was waged by representatives of that highest [of] higher races, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, using the latest European weaponry. The wa[r] certainly brought home the importance of quick-firing artillery, as the small numbers [of] Krupp-made Boer guns were able to successfully engage the much heavier, but cumbersom[e] and slow-firing British pieces.'[18] It also demonstrated the importance of rifle fire, a lesso[n] that the British took to heart by training their men to deliver "twelve rounds a minut[e,] aimed," as the saying went.

Of course this experience should have led to the realization that the day of cavalry wa[s] past and that any future horsemen should fight dismounted, as the Boers did, despite bein[g] excellent riders. However, that lesson proved a bitter pill to take, and was mostly rejecte[d.] For centuries on end, officers had been horsemen first and foremost. Cavalry, the aristocrati[c] arm, had always looked down on the poor unfortunate foot sloggers. In one Germa[n] caricature, mounted officers wondered how the infantry ever succeeded in getting from on[e] place to the next. Rulers themselves often presented themselves on horseback. Frozen in th[e] statues with which they adorned their squares, avenues, and streets, the ruling classe[s] immortalized themselves upon the universal symbols of power and privilege.[19]

The man who commanded the British forces on the Western Front during most of Worl[d] War I, Field Marshal Douglas Haig, was himself a cavalryman. As a young officer in 189[8] Haig, along with Winston Churchill, had charged the Dervishes at Omdurman. Nine yea[rs] later, having risen to become director of training, he personally was responsible f[or] reintroducing the lance.[20] Other armies had never abolished it in the first place. Thus th[e] cavalry of all countries rode into World War I almost as if the war in South Africa had nev[er] taken place.

To those not blinded by racism, by far the war most telling of things to come was th[at] fought between Russia and Japan in 1904–5, but again the lessons drawn from it were wron[g] for the most part.[21] First and foremost was the great naval battle of Tsushima. Befo[re] Tsushima, there were thirty years of peace on the high seas, during which the transition fro[m] sail to steam had been completed and had thoroughly confused both practitioners an[d] theoreticians. Using ancient Athens for guidance, many thought that future battles would b[e] decided by approaching the enemy in wedge formation and ramming him, a view that th[e]

battle of Lissa (1866) seemed to confirm.[22] Battleships, accordingly, came equipped wi[th] huge rams, the power of which was illustrated in 1893 when the HMS *Camperdown* wa[s] accidentally rammed during maneuvers off Malta and went to the bottom in only a fe[w] minutes, taking along all of her crew. What a relief, then, when Tsushima put order into th[e] confusion, proving that arrays of heavy cannon, carried by battleships arranged in such a wa[y] as to deliver the greatest firepower, continued to rule the seas as they had since the end [of] the seventeenth century.[23]

More foreboding was the "success" of the Japanese infantry. Wielding bayonets an[d] supported by heavy artillery, they ultimately succeeded in breaking through the Russian lin[es] at Mukden. However, this victory masked the fact that in doing so they took no fewer tha[n] forty-one thousand casualties. The Russian army was merely pushed back along its own lin[es] of communications and had not the tsarist empire been racked by the revolution of 1905, [it] could and would have fought another day. It was this belief in the frontal infantry atta[ck,] supported by artillery, that killed so many troops on the Western Front between 1914 an[d] 1918. Perhaps the only valid lesson one could draw from the war was how hard it was [to] attack and take a fortified city, such as Port Arthur, from the sea. As the 1915 Gallipo[li] campaign was to show, that lesson, too, was not heeded.

Much worse still, the idea that wars would be short, lively, and decisive—as, given the[ir] enormous cost, they had to be—had hardened into dogma; one of those who expounded [it] was the German chief of staff Alfred von Schlieffen (who served from 1891 to 1905).[24]" Wi[th] the exception of Foch, who had some curious things to say about the matter,[25] most militar[y] experts well understood the effect that the proliferation of machine guns and other quic[k-] firing weapons would have. They increased the power of the tactical defense, making it a[ll] but impossible for the attackers to cross the few hundred yards of beaten zone before the[y] could close with their enemies. However, few of them were prepared to resign themselves [to] this fact, and understandably so. If armies could no longer attack, then obviously there wou[ld] be nothing to defend against. If there was nothing to defend against, then the day woul[d] come when they would be dissolved—as some people feared and others hoped.

Instead, commanders—not just those in French uniforms, as too many historians hav[e] written[26]—looked for ways to circumvent the problem and overcome it. One way was b[y] carrying out wide-ranging strategic movements so as to outflank the enemy lines. If keepin[g] the cavalry had any rationale at all, this was it; yet in doing so commanders overlooked th[e] fact that distances in Europe were much smaller than in, say, the United States, where durin[g] the Civil War cavalry had sometimes played a similar role. Another was the hope that heav[y] artillery could destroy the enemy defenses. Many officers even seemed to believe that if the[y] could only train their troops to attack under all circumstances, they would be able to rend[er] them more or less bulletproof.

People, like the Jewish-Polish-Russian railway magnate Ivan Bloch, who drew the corre[ct] conclusions and predicted a long war that would be decided, if it could be decided at all, b[y] sheer attrition, were taken to task for failing to understand "the reality of military affairs["] and ignored.[27] Here and there the "frocks" and the "brass hats" changed places, the forme[r] engaging in illusions and the latter advising caution. Take the newly appointed Britis[h]

minister of war, Field Marshal Herbert Kitchener. When he told his civilian colleagues in t[he] cabinet that the war would last for years and require the creation of armies numbering in th[e] millions, they thought he had gone mad.

By the turn of the century, all modern countries were endowed with a more or less dens[e] network of railways as well as telegraphs and telephones. It was thought that the side th[at] could use these instruments to mobilize and deploy the fastest would gain an importan[t,] perhaps decisive, advantage. Therefore it was only natural that the most talented office[rs] tended to cluster in the railway departments of general staffs, drawing up plans [in] painstaking detail. The result was a tendency to see war itself as something that, projecte[d] from the railheads, would proceed as if by timetable. Blithely ignoring the enemy and simp[ly] using a pair of dividers, planners calculated that so and so many days were needed to rea[ch] this objective, so and so many the next. Thus, upon the signal being given, each oppone[nt] would mobilize its reserve players who would then entrain *(“Marchons, citoyens, montez, s[ur] les trains,”* as an informal variant on the “Marseillaise” had it), dis-entrain, march, encounte[r,] engage, break through, outflank, encircle, kill, take one another prisoner, and be home b[y] Christmas.

The model for much of this was neither the Russian Japanese War of 1904–5 nor the Bo[er] War of 1899–1900, both of which had taken place in faraway lands under what many peop[le] considered less-than-civilized conditions. Instead it was the Franco-Prussian War, thre[e] decades earlier. This, it was thought, still presented the most “modern” war in history [to] date. Some officers, the French in particular, sought to derive lessons from Napoleon[ic] warfare, which they studied at very great length in order to discover the emperor’s “secre[t]” as well as the immutable “principles of war.” In Germany, many commanders still looked [as] far back as the campaigns of Frederick the Great for more insight. For example, one gener[al] wrote an entire book showing that troop movements similar to those the king had carried o[ut] with thirty-three thousand men at Leuthen in 1757 were still feasible in the modern age wi[th] its millions upon millions of troops.[28]

The universal belief in a short war had important consequences. Each country prepared [to] open hostilities from a flying start, so to speak. So and so many vehicles, rifles, machi[ne] guns, cannon, and their ammunition were available. For instance, Germany, as the bes[t] prepared country of all, had about a thousand rounds per artillery barrel. Even assuming [a] consumption rate three times as high as in 1870–71, this should have sufficed for about tw[o] years; no wonder they entered the war with a feeling of confidence. The equipment would b[e] taken out of the depots where it was stored and looked after, and married with the availab[le] pool of trained personnel. However, very few officers gave any thought to the need [to] continue, let alone increase military production after the outbreak of hostilities. The need f[or] the organization and control of raw materials, factories, transportation arteries, and labo[r] that would be required for the purpose could not even be contemplated. War, it wa[s] believed, would result in declining living standards and a “return to the primitiv[e] circumstances of our ancestors,” including a massive rise in unemployment. Thus, for war [to] be of any length would be ruinous to civilization. When, a few months after the opening [of] hostilities, the opposite proved to be the case, everything had to be improvised.

Some things never change, and although many a young man saw military service as the gateway to personal glory, such romantic notions were not shared by all. Even in militari[st] Germany, especially among the well-educated middle class, officers were ridiculed fo[r] allegedly having no higher interests whatsoever. When people claimed that the kaiser ha[d] sought the philosopher's stone and found it in the aide de camp this was hardly meant as [a] compliment. In Germany, as in Italy and Russia, some people emigrated specifically to avo[id] being conscripted, much to the chagrin of governments, which felt unable to stop them.

Perhaps more important, the period from 1899 to 1907 witnessed two successiv[e] international peace congresses being held in the Netherlands. The initiative came from Tsa[r] Nicholas II of Russia. Personally, Nicholas was a mild character dominated by his Germa[n] wife, who herself ended up dominated by that uncouth priest Rasputin. He would not hav[e] been out of place as a constitutional monarch, and might even have enjoyed acting in such [a] role. Ostensibly, his purpose was the purely idealistic one of saving the world from th[e] horrors of war. However, some evil tongues claimed that what really motivated him was th[e] realization that his country was unable to keep up in the arms race against Germany an[d] Japan in particular.

The need to maintain face in front of public opinion forced the most important countries [to] send their representatives to The Hague, but not everybody took the talks seriously. Fo[r] example, when the German kaiser first heard of the idea he threatened to "s t" on all the[se] reso lutions.[29] The American representative to the first conference was none other tha[n] Alfred Mahan himself. Piously, he declared that "power, force, [sic] is a faculty of nation[al] life; one of the talents committed to nations by God."[30]? He also opposed a ban on poiso[n] gas, opining that being asphyxiated was no worse than being torpedoed.

Perhaps the best commentary was provided by a Dutch children's song claiming that th[e] next congress would take place at Merenberg, a well-known lunatic asylum at the time.[31] A[s] most people had expected, this congress, as well as the next, achieved little in the way [of] reducing the threat of war. They did, however, produce some useful protocols concerning th[e] ways war should and should not be waged.

Equally ineffective, if more sincere, were the various pacifist movements. The hope tha[t] "progress" would bring people to their senses and make them turn their backs on war ru[ns] through the nineteenth century like a red thread, from the economist Friedrich List in th[e] 1830s all the way to the inventor and industrialist Alfred Nobel in the 1890s. At least on[e] well-known peace activist, the Scottish American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, seems [to] have been motivated by his desire to compensate the God who had given him so much, an[d] his Carnegie Peace Foundation remains active to the present day.

Probably the most famous pacifist was an Austrian noblewoman, Bertha von Suttner.[32] Fo[r] three decades, she toured Europe and the United States, organizing conferences, speakin[g] and writing about peace. Her main book, *Nieder die Waffen,* written in 1889, received muc[h] attention and was translated into several languages; it was followed by a periodical with th[e] same title. In 1905, her efforts got her the Nobel Peace Prize, founded by the man whos[e] secretary she had once been. Ironically, Mme. von Suttner died in June 1914 and was th[us]

spared the horrors that followed.

This was also the time when socialist movements were gathering strength throughout th[e] world. The socialists' objection to the military and its institutions had little to do wi[th] pacifism; rather, to them these were the mainstays of the existing regimes, the home [of] reactionaries, conservatives, clericalists, militarists, and imperialists—and very often th[at] view was well justified. After all, most European countries were still ruled by monarchs, a[nd] the only army that had not begun its history as a royal guard was that of Switzerland. Th[at] fact was reflected not only on ceremonial occasions, when they were called upon to perfor[m] precisely that role, but also in the way their members behaved in the presence of th[e] sovereign. As photographs show, ladies were supposed to curtsy and gentlemen, dressed [in] black, to doff their hats with bowed heads. Officers, by contrast, were expected to stan[d] straight— no servility there—and salute with shining eyes as if meeting an old comrade. Thu[s] the fiction that monarchs, before they were anything else, were commanders in chief who le[d] their men to battle was maintained. Even in France, until at least 1900 most officers wer[e] probably royalists at heart and took offense at the idea of being commanded by me[re] civilians.[33]

In 1907, the German general staff went so far as to produce a handbook, *Fighting [in] Insurgent Towns,* to instruct commanders in that long-forgotten art. One of its first provision[s] was that, in case of need, it was the duty of every officer to strike without waiting f[or] parliamentary approval—and if necessary to do so even against parliament's will.

Socialist leaders could not but be aware of at least some of what was going on. In plac[es] where the political system permitted them to do so, such as France and Germany, the[y] campaigned to place limits on the influence of the military, as well as the funding. Jea[n] Jaures, the brilliant head of the Section Francaise de l'Internationale Ouvriere and a memb[er] of the French parliament, went further. He wrote a book demanding that standing armies b[e] replaced with popular militias.[34] Electing the officers, training in their spare time, and riddin[g] themselves of the intellectual baggage of regular armies, they would be equally effective [in] defending the nation; at the same time, they would be incapable of being used against it, an[d] they might do some useful things in helping it realize its ideals. As might be expected, amon[g] military circles the book was ridiculed. Nothing came of it in any country except neutr[al] Switzerland, and then not because of any conscious decision but simply because the milit[ia] there was already established, having a history going back all the way to the Middle Ages.

At the time when the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, wa[s] assassinated at Sarajevo, the socialist representatives in the parliaments of the variou[s] countries were within several weeks of holding their international meeting in Vienna. Li[ke] most other people, at first they expected the crisis to be resolved without bloodshed; indee[d] their chief concern was that the Serb delegates might not be able to attend. As the situati[on] became more menacing, however, they seemed to undergo a mysterious change of mind.

For years previously, socialists had talked themselves hoarse, claiming that war was th[e] fault of the ruling classes in general and swearing to oppose it if and when it came. Now eac[h] one, blaming the ruling classes of the other country, absolved his own; it was as if they we[re] subject to some atavistic herd instinct most of them thought they had long left behind. Nex[t] almost to a man, they and their followers voted for the war, put on a uniform, and went o[ff]

to fight much as everybody else did. Indeed to some people it seemed as if the worker[ ] disappointed by having to wait for a violent revolution that never came, saw the war as a[ ] acceptable alternative.

As Jaures's own fate suggested—attempting to set up a common German-French anti-wa[r] front, he fell victim to an assassin's bullet— popularity was not to be found with either th[e] socialists or pacifists. The cue to what was socially desirable was provided by the heads [of] state themselves. In 1901, most of them went to London to participate in the funeral [of] Queen Victoria; except for the president of France, who for that reason cut a rather poo[r] figure, every single one wore a uniform. The way was led by the German kaiser. Part[ly] because he thought uniforms suited him, partly because he was always trying to look tough[er] than he really was, he rarely made a public appearance while dressed in anything else. Wi[th] such an example before their eyes, no wonder it was the fondest dream of every goo[d] German bourgeois to be made a lieutenant of the reserve. After all, Bismarck himself on[ce] said that humanity started at that rank.

In every country that had it, conscription turned the military into the largest sing[le] organization by far, with all the economic and social consequences that such a situati[on] entails. It also compelled the authorities to glorify their armed forces so as to make peop[le] willing to serve. Looking back, perhaps nothing is more surprising than the success the[y] enjoyed in doing just that.[35] In France, which conscripted a greater percentage of i[ts] population than did any other country, there was much talk of the military as "the school [of] the nation," the one organization where all youngsters met and underwent the gre[at] experience that fused them together. This was even more true in Italy. As the country['s] founder, Benso Cavour, had once remarked, the unification of the peninsula did n[ot] automatically Italians make. The early years of the state were marked by revolts by th[e] inhabitants of Sicily against the Piedmontese officials who had been sent to rule over the[m;] indeed, so far apart were northerners and southerners that they could not even understa[nd] each other's dialects. Obligatory military service was seen, and deliberately used, as perhap[s] the most important means to correct this problem.

Military pay tended to be on the low side; indeed, in Germany people sometimes spoke [of] *"glaenzende Elend"* (glittering misery). Here as elsewhere, soldiers' high social status oft[en] translated itself into material benefits after retirement. Whether because the law mandated [it] or because of their reputation for reliability, former noncommissioned officers we[re] frequently given preference in joining the lower rungs of the civil service including, whe[re] they were publicly owned, the railways—which in many places constituted the largest sing[le] employer of all. Officers, on the other hand, could expect to receive modest pensions and us[e] them in order to set up house in the countryside. More senior officers might receive seats [on] the boards of large corporations. While the term *revolving door* did not yet exist, th[e] phenomenon it describes definitely did.

Only in Britain and the United States, considered the most commercial of nations and hen[ce] the farthest removed from "militancy," were things somewhat different. Since these countri[es] did not have conscription, their armed forces were relatively much smaller. They were als[o] less influential; their governments did not have to glorify war as much as the rest did. On th[e] negative side, their forces tended to be filled by unemployable members of the worki[ng]

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