

## **THE REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS: THE HISTORIAN'S PERSPECTIVE\***

***Dr. Jeremy Black, Department of History, Exeter University***

The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), a phrase much employed over the last decade, is at once description, analysis, prospectus and mission; and much of the confusion surrounding the use of the term reflects a failure to distinguish between these aspects of the situation. As such, the treatment of the RMA is an aspect of the more general discussion of revolutions in military affairs, a discussion pushed forward by interest in the RMA, although their very existence is problematic and it might, instead, be suggested that we are dealing with simply one variant of a more or less usual evolution.

Discussion of military revolutions has a long genesis, not least with reference to the contemporary European treatment of the impact of firearms. Nevertheless, it has become more common over the last half-century, in response to the success of the concept of an early-modern European military revolution advanced by Michael Roberts in 1955 when he applied it to the period 1560-1660, with specific reference to the Dutch and to Sweden. The success of this concept, at least in helping to define debate for early-modern European military history, ensured that it was then applied to other periods. This, however, had a somewhat problematic character, not least because a questioning of the notion of the Roberts revolution, in terms of both content and chronology, coincided with this application.

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Furthermore, the definitions of military revolution offered in applications of the theory varied greatly, not least in terms of duration, content and impact, as well as variations in their use between the tactical, operational and strategic scales of war, and between military and non-military dimensions. Technological changes are only part of the story, which can indeed be understood by putting these changes in a social-organisational context. This provides a context, more generally, for assessing readings of the RMA which focus on technology, although, a strand of RMA though argues that this technology is a key aspect of the context, specifically that information technology creates change in learning, knowledge and organisational behaviour, and is as important as precision weapons in the RMA. In short, an 'information age' transforming command, society and all forms of technology are discerned. The variation in definitions of military revolution should induce caution, but military revolution became like the rise of the middle classes, at once a thesis of infinite applicability and a process that was always occurring and always incomplete.

This introduction could serve as a short background for a discussion of the current RMA, but a longer introduction is necessary for two reasons. First, it is appropriate to explain how the belief in the RMA in part arises from a need that can be explained, and, secondly, in order to discern a parallel between the RMA of the 1990s and 2000s and that discussed in the aftermath of World War One. The latter is of relevance, not only because it provides a parallel, but also because it indicates how belief in military revolution or transformation was a product of need and indeed specific problems, as is also the case today.

In the earlier case, the problem was tactical, operational and strategic in military terms – the varied difficulties of winning World War One – but also social, political and cultural, in terms of a reaction against the unprecedented losses of that

conflict. The war had ended in 1918 in Allied victory and, in large part, there was a matter of extrapolating from the supposed lessons of the final victorious campaign. This was driven further by a determination to ensure that, in any future conflict, there was no repetition of the war-making of World War One, and in particular of its longevity and very heavy casualties. These goals led to a determination to argue that the new weaponry of World War One, if properly understood and applied could be employed to further, indeed constitute, a war-making that was effective and decisive, although, as today, this entailed the misapplication of tactical and operational capabilities and lessons, for operational and strategic ends respectively.

Thus, in the 1920s, as in the 1990s, there was much interest in the apparent potential of air power and mechanised warfare, the latter in the shape of the tank. As today, this involved the contentious issue of evaluating what had occurred in its most difficult aspect, causal analysis; and the problem of reconciling theory and practice, in the shape of deciding how best to integrate the supposed lessons of real and contemporary campaigning with doctrine.

Again, as today, there was also the question of which war or type of war was likely to occur. The range of present possibilities may seem extensive – the USA now having to prepare to fight China, as well as to persist in the ‘War on Terror’ in its very different iterations– but the situation was little different for the major imperial powers in the 1920s. It was unclear at the start of that decade whether it would be possible to stop Soviet expansion short of full-scale war and, thereafter, it was unclear whether there would be subversion in the West as a result of pro-Soviet activity, a concern that underlay the American War Plan White. States did not succumb to labour activism in this fashion, but such problems had been anticipated.

Secondly, it was unclear how far it would be necessary to fight in order to defend imperial possessions, and the problems this entailed was extended by the expansion of these possessions into the Middle East as a result of the partition of the Ottoman (Turkish) empire, with both Britain and France becoming Middle Eastern powers. New technology could seem an answer to these issues. Aircraft seemed a key capability advantage, providing both firepower and mobility, and, albeit less dramatically, the same case could be made for mechanised vehicles. Indeed, both were extensively used in the Middle East, the British, for example, employing aircraft in Iraq, Yemen and Somaliland.

The variety of tasks that the Western military might have had to face in the 1920s is a reminder that 'transformation', in the shape of new capability, the dominant theme in accounts of revolutions in military affairs, is of limited value as an analytical concept unless it is understood in interaction with tasking. It is pertinent to remember that this is a two-way process: capability can help shape tasking and, indeed, affect the assumptions referred to as strategic culture; but, on the whole, it is tasking that sets the terms within which capability becomes operative.

In part, this is because of the crucial, and related, issues of procurement and prioritisation. Far from capability flowing automatically, or semi-automatically, from new developments, it is necessary to understand that, at any one time, there is a range of military options available for fresh and continuing investment. Indeed, the possibility for enhanced capabilities that stem from technological developments has made this situation more difficult, because the range of possibilities has grown at the same time that their real cost has risen and, also, that the possibility of interchangeability has diminished as a product of the need for specialisation in order to obtain cutting-edge advantage. These problems both ensure the need for greater

claims for proficiency on behalf of particular options, in order for them to justify support; and lead to a related need to rank options, whether weapons systems, organisational models, doctrines, or tactical and operational methods. This competition is one of the contexts of the RMA: it becomes a prospectus that encourages support, or, looked at more harshly, a key aspect in an incessant bidding war. This becomes clearer if the so-called military-industrial complex is understood not as a monolith but, instead and more accurately, as a sphere of dividing and competing interests each advancing their case through bold claims.

Linked to this is the issue of prioritisation. This involves the need to consider the range of tasks and how best to respond to this variety. Thus, for example, in 1936-7, it might seem necessary to invest in tanks in order to confront the possibility of a Continental war with Germany, but, as far as the threat-environment was concerned for Britain, there was also the prospect of naval action against Italy in the Mediterranean, and against Japan in the Far East. Furthermore, there were large-scale present obligations in the shape of the Arab rising in Palestine and the Waziristan campaigns on the North-West Frontier of India. Even if the colonial dimension was neglected (and for Britain, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain this was not feasible), there were serious choices. Should France focus on defence against Germany, or should it also assume Italian antipathy, which challenged the maritime routes from France to North Africa and Lebanon/Syria? More generally, how far should any interwar revolution in military affairs focus on offensive or defensive capabilities, and how far were weapons systems suited to one appropriate for the other?

Evaluating World War Two from this perspective casts further doubt on the idea that RMAs are straightforward, either in terms of analysis of what is occurring or

with reference to their consequences. Few prepared for what was to happen. For example, the Germans were not really preparing for *blitzkrieg* and instead learned from their successful war of manoeuvre in Poland in 1939 what could be achieved. Similarly, navies sought carriers and submarines only as a subordinate part of fleets that emphasised battleships. In short, force capabilities were developed for particular goods and then it was discovered that they could be used in other contexts.

These issues provide a necessary background for considering the situation after 1945. In one respect, this involved a considerable measure in continuity, and, therefore, no need for a revolution in military affairs. The tools for conventional war – aircraft carriers, submarines, tanks – were similar, but so, even more, were some of the tasks. For the Soviets an advance into Western Europe would be, in some respects, a similar stage to that to Berlin and Vienna in 1945, while, for NATO, there was the need, for example, to consider the defence of North Atlantic shipping routes against Soviet submarines, continuing the large-scale efforts made by the British, Canadians, and Americans in World War Two. Yet, there were also major differences between the strategic situations in both conflicts. These ranged from the capabilities provided by atomic weaponry and intercontinental delivery systems, to the need for NATO to consider how best to succeed in the face of the major conventional superiority of their opponents, the opposite scenario to that involved in war with Germany once Hitler expanded the opposing alliance by attacking the Soviet Union.

In some respects, these responses to the post-war Soviet threat provided the basis for what was subsequently to be termed the RMA, as long as the very disparate nature of the latter is considered. The dominance of space is a key issue

in modern capability and strategy, and this was latent as soon as rocketry moved beyond the simplistic guidance systems seen in World War Two. The rocket-race from the late 1950s relied, in the absence of anti-rocket technology, on deterrence or first-strike as a defence. The development of anti-rocket rockets and the effective surveillance and detection that such interception requires, links the Cold War to the present situation, and indeed the future, and is a reminder of the pitfalls of assigning the RMA solely to the post-Cold War years.

This is also true of the doctrine of mobile battle and the related weaponry that developed from the late 1970s in response both to the Soviet doctrine of deep battle and to the need to be able to fight a conventional war in Europe. The RMA can therefore be seen as an alternative to Armageddon: an attempt to create a winnable option for non-nuclear or sub-nuclear war. The roots of the RMA are therefore late Cold War. In particular, from Air Land Battle and the Soviet idea of a military-technological revolution, thinkers on both sides were thinking about ways to change radically the way main battles were fought, and so to gain an edge, which they interpreted as meaning that a revolution was happened (or could be forced) and that, by adjusting to this revolution, it was possible to improve position.

That this doctrine and weaponry were, in the event, to be used most prominently in the Iraq Wars of 1991 and 2003 creates a post-Cold War impression for the timing and tasking of this warfare, but the reality, instead, is of the application of the Cold War military. This is also true, for example, of guided aerial munitions, which, in fact, were used from the Vietnam War, and of cruise missiles, which were deployed in Europe from 1983, and tested in Alberta because the Americans argued that its terrain was similar to that of Siberia.

Thus the RMA, as conventionally understood, describes in fact the improvement, or modernisation, in terms of technological possibilities within a tasking driven by competitive pressures, of World War Two/early Cold War systems. In particular, on the part to the USA, this entailed a response to the enhancement offered by electronics in order to confront the scenarios posed by successive challenges from the Communist powers, and within the context of a willingness, even in the 1980s eagerness, to spend the money to face the challenge.

During the early 1990s, these ideas became predicates in the way that many US officers thought about a revolution that they could lead and through which they could win. The force structures which, in the event, won the two Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003 were recognisably those generated to make Air Land Battle work up against precisely the kind of forces they had been intended to smash, but very badly used. In practice, these campaigns did not prove much about an RMA, simply what happens when a weak and poorly-commanded force is attacked by a stronger and better-led one. These differences were more relevant than those ascribed to the RMA.

Cold War capability, nevertheless, was shaped by commentators into a RMA in the very different context of post-Cold War pressures and priorities, in particular the need to provide for power projection, as well as the call for transformation so as to move from a Cold War military to a more varied successor, a process that provided a rationale for particular producer-lobbies. This transformation put the emphasis on a multi-purpose and joint, or integrated, military, while leaving specific tasks less clear. As a consequence, capabilities seemed key, as both means and goal in military planning, and thus the RMA could be proclaimed as both process and result. However, alongside this approach, it is necessary to note that many RMA

enthusiasts were visionaries or advocates operating in complex bureaucracies with many voices, and it is not clear that the theorists of the time really affected the development of force structures in a simple or even significant way.

Broader requirements were also served by discerning and defining military revolution. They can be discussed, without any suggestion of prioritisation, in terms of liberal internationalism, the particular requirements of American foreign policy, and the growing disjuncture between ambitious Western goals and a widespread reluctance to risk casualties. Liberal internationalism became part of the new world order that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union with the argument, fed in particular by the atrocities in Rwanda in 1994 and Bosnia in 1995, that there was a duty to intervene in order to prevent humanitarian disasters. Such intervention presupposed success, and relied on the notion of a clear capability gap between the two sides. Indeed, from the humanitarian perspective, the forces of good had to be successful in order to avoid the suffering that would result from a difficult conquest. This concept helped explain the difficulties faced by Anglo-American representatives when discussed Iraqi casualties during and after the war of 2003.

From the perspective of American foreign policy, the RMA also explained how policy goals could be fulfilled, as this policy rested in part on a military underpinning, and in particular on how best to forestall threats. The need to be able to respond to more than one threat simultaneously, for example conflict with North Korea and the Middle East, was regarded as especially important, and the force multiplication offered by the RMA was particularly important in this context. In short, the RMA made American foreign policy possible: it contributed not only to strategic concerns but also to foreign policy interests around the world.

It is also necessary to consider the extent to which the RMA was the necessary product of the RAM (Revolution in Attitudes to the Military), or rather a specific RAM, in the shape of the greater reluctance to take casualties. This was true both in specifics and in generalities. In specific terms, for example, American concern about the impact on morale of having aircrew shot down and taken prisoner in the Vietnam War helped encourage an interest in stand-off weaponry. More generally, the movement from mass militaries in the West to smaller professional forces made soldiers fewer but more valuable; while civil society as a whole became more reluctant to regard casualties as acceptable. The two developments were linked, albeit different. They each encouraged a desire for an RMA to provide apparently casualty-low, if not free, war.

As, however, with other such revolutions, it is far from clear how far these criteria are generally applicable. Indeed, the notion of a RMA takes on many of the characteristics of a paradigm model that may in fact not be of more general applicability. The very cost of Transformation in an American context does not mean that other powers will not seek the same end, but, in doing so, they should not necessarily be understood as simply lesser-string players in an RMA. Instead, the more the latter is understood as, at least in part, task-defined, rather than capability-determined, the more it will be appropriate to note differences between particular powers. The results will affect doctrine and procurement, and may well mean that the RMA is understood not as a transforming stage in military history but, instead, as a particular moment in that of the USA.

As such, it is the specific circumstances and strategic and military cultures of the latter that require consideration. Indeed, this may mean that, in time, the RMA is treated as an aspect of American exceptionalism. This, like the exceptionalism or

*sonderweg* any other state, is best understood in terms of the complex interaction of description and discourse; and thus the RMA provides the opportunity to advance both. In doing so, the notion corresponds to another tradition of American exceptionalism, its self-identification with best practice. This is very important to American writers: their exceptionalism is both separate and distinctive, helping to define them and also being defined accordingly; but is also linked to an interaction with the rest of the world in which it is important not only for the Americans to be first and foremost, but also for them to be seen in this light. The RMA is thus, at the level of discourse, an assertion of difference and primacy. This would be challenged if, at the descriptive level, thanks to a widespread process of Transformation, such practices became widespread, but concern and response would then combine to produce another iteration in which the Americans could be first. Throughout the machine age, this has been a key aspect of American self-belief, helping to ensure concern about Soviet advances in the Space Race. The ideology of mechanization is key both to the modern American imagination about force (as seen, for example, in science fiction, a potent source of ideas, as much as in discussion of the military), and to the specific belief in the RMA; although there is a danger that some criticism of the RMA can entail a measure of anti-Americanism.

In a machine age, there is a powerful tendency to define worth in terms of machines, and they, rather than ideas or beliefs, are used to assert superiority over other beliefs, as well as over the environment. Furthermore, change and the measurement of specifications are the inherent characteristics of what can be termed machinism: machines are designed to serve a purpose in specific terms, can be improved, have a limited life (in the sense of being at the cutting edge of applicability), and are intended for replacement in what is a continual process of

improvement, indeed perfectibility. This is not inherently incompatible with the notion of improvement as a responsiveness to circumstances, but that lacks the cultural potency of the notion of continual cutting-edge perfectibility. Thus, the RMA meets the American need to believe in the possibility of high-intensity conflict and of total victory, with opponents shocked and awed into accepting defeat, rather than the ambiguous and qualified nature of victory in the real world. This certainty is attractive not only psychologically but also in response to the changing threat-environment.

Thus the RMA appears to offer a defence against the threats posed by the uncontrolled spread of earlier technologies, such as long-range missiles and atomic warheads, of worrying new ones, such as bacteriological warfare, and of whatever may follow. Indeed, preparing to stand for president, George W. Bush in September 1999 told an audience at the Citadel, a particularly conservative military academy, that 'the best way to keep the peace is to redefine war on our terms'. Once elected, he declared at the Citadel in 2001, 'The first priority is to speed the transformation of our military'.

At the same time, it is necessary to be cautious in suggesting too much coherence and consistency in the idea of an RMA. A less harsh view can be advanced if the RMA is presented as a doctrine designed to meet political goals, and thus to shape or encourage technological developments and operational and tactical suppositions accordingly, rather than to allow technological constraints to shape doctrine, and thus risk the danger of inhibiting policy.

If the RMA is seen as a discourse designed to win the argument, within and outside the military, for investment in a particular doctrine and force structure, in short as the ideology of Transformation, then, at the operational and tactical levels, it

can be seen as of value provided that a unitary model of tasking, that automatically maximises this value, is not taken. At both levels, there have been important advances in overcoming the problems of command and control posed by the large number of units operating simultaneously, and on fulfilling the opportunities for command and control gained by successfully overcoming this challenge, and thus aggregating sensors, shooters and deciders to achieve a precise mass effect from dispersed units. It is not new that better communications enable more integrated fire support and the use of surveillance to permit more accurate targeting, but these have been taken forward by the new technology that attract the attention of RMA enthusiasts. The latter emphasise the need for speed in order to get within opposing decision cycles, which are also to be deliberately disorientated and disrupted. Again, this is not new, but it has been given a central role at the operational level.

Western, especially American, economic growth and borrowing capacity, and American resource-allocation give substance to such ideas, because they make it easier to afford investment in new military systems; or, at least, the development of earlier ones. The extent to which uncertainty over tasking challenges this is unclear. Uncertainty over tasking certainly ensures that Transformation has to be understood as a number of processes designed to meet a number of goals, and because of this it is unclear how far it will be restricted largely to the USA. If the RMA ends up meaning this, then it becomes, at least to a considerable extent, a truism and a platitude, which indeed is the fate of many tendencies styled by its advocates (or others) as revolutionary.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND THE EXPANSION OF THE WEST RECONSIDERED**

This essay seeks to engage with two of the key issues in military history, the role of technology and the expansion of the West, and to assess the relationship between them. At the outset, however, it is necessary to assess the conceptual background of the subject.

Academic scholarship does not stand aside from the pressure of changing circumstances, and this is certainly true of military history. This might appear surprising given the extent to which operational military history tends to adopt the same approach as in the past and indeed to focus on the identical cast of battles and commanders. However, in terms of central narratives in military history, there has been much more variety in approach. At the same time, this variety can be conceptualised in terms of a continuum, rather than necessarily being a matter of stark contrasts, as is sometimes suggested, particularly in academe where operational history is generally used as the hostile 'other' by those seeking to define and take a War and Society approach.

This continuum in terms of central narratives is organised round a potentially bi-polar distinction between technological and social factors and approaches. The first put the stress on the material culture of war and specifically on weaponry. The second, in contrast, was most closely associated with the War and Society approach. It would be readily easy to associate these tendencies with shifts in the wider intellectual culture. War and Society, indeed, can be linked to 1960s values and interests, not least the impact of new social science approaches, particularly anthropology, sociology and collective psychology. War and Society, however, is a very loose concept and in many respects. Although it can seem far removed from

conflict, *War and Society* offers much so long as it is appreciated that battles and armies, and generals using armies in a rational-instrumental fashion are the core of the study.

At the same time, it is worth noting the extent to which approaches, both of material culture and of *War and Society*, have a lengthy pedigree. Arguments that technology was a motor of change, as well as a definition of capability, were commonplace from the spread of hand-held firearms on a major scale, a spread that coincided with the development of printing. At the same time, analysis of the relationship between social structures and military strength and developments, is also longstanding. It can be seen, for example, in the consideration of this relationship by eighteenth-century British writers, such as Edward Gibbon, William Robertson and Adam Smith. In particular, there was an argument that human development led to distinctive forms of social structure linked to economic arrangements, particularly, if a four stage theory was adopted, hunting, shepherd, agrarian and urban societies. This was seen to relate to military systems, in particular the extent to which all men served, or to which such service was a specialised function of a cohort of society, with all the consequences that entailed. This was by no means co-terminous with modern *War and Society* work, but it is a reminder that the latter was not simply a product of the 1960s, although modern specialists in that field have made scant attempt to historicize their work in terms of a longer-term context.

Technology and society are not contrasting, but interdependent. At the most general level, technology is a product of social arrangements, not least in terms of the take up of possibilities. This is certainly true of military technology. Thus, a prime question with firearms was the extent to which their capability could be

realised through training, and to which the latter entailed particular types of drill and discipline that reflected social patterning. The extent to which society itself owes much to technological possibilities is readily apparent, and this underlines the problems with separating out strands for analysis.

Against this background, it is pertinent to ask how best to understand the cultural approach to military history. In practice, the term should rather be approaches, as there has been a number of distinctive uses of cultural categories in the field of military studies, not least with reference to strategic culture and organisational culture. The former is understood as the set of strategic assumptions held by a particular group, and the latter as the attitudes that determined or influenced the working of the military. The cultural interpretation to the history of war, however, focuses not on these but, instead, on the argument that particular societies have specific characteristics in war-making. This approach has been repeatedly referred to when discussing the rise of the West, both explicitly and implicitly, but it is not without serious problems. In particular, there is a lack of clarity over whether the cultural factors are simply descriptive or explanatory as well. If the latter, it is unclear how far this explanatory possibility relates to other ways of approaching military history. Indeed, in many respects, the cultural approach is a non-Marxist type of social history and, as such, reflects the broadening out of the social history of war that was seen from the 1960s. The cultural approach in fact could be annexed to the wider field of War and Society, were that not to dilute the latter too much and to lessen the distinctive value of the cultural approach.

Cultural accounts also have to consider the unit for analysis and explanation. In particular, there is a need to discuss the relevance of racial or ethnic considerations, and the pertinence, instead, of culture understood as a learned

process that can therefore vary considerably between states that might otherwise have an identical or similar ethnic composition. In general, this raises the problems of proximity and familiarity. Commentators are frequently careful in noting distinctions within areas with which they are familiar, such as Western Europe, but far less ready to do so for those at a distance.

This has greatly affected the discussion of relations between Western and non-Western societies, a key issue in military history. The central problem for discussion has been why the West succeeded, but there has been a tendency to short-circuit the difficulties of this topic. An emphasis on real or apparent Western capability advantages has proved a central way to approach the problem, but it tends to rest on structural assumptions that are then applied in a deterministic fashion; structural analyses as, so often being linked to deterministic expositions. This is a fault with much of the 'Western way of war' approach.

A related failing is that of assuming an ideal state, for both West and non-West, a tendency that leads to a failure to appreciate the diversity of either. Thus, for example, work on the West generally focuses on Western Europe and the USA, and neglects the extent to which there were multiple narratives of Western development, not least the overly-neglected case of Latin America. Even as far as Western Europe is concerned, there were major differences between Britain and France. If Britain is seen as different because of its maritime character, there were still major differences between France and Spain, and Denmark, Portugal and the Netherlands. This was not simply a case of capability, but also of tasking and of national cultural assumptions about the use of force. Variations in the latter were sustained and, even, strengthened by domestic political developments and the role of the military in them.

Consideration of the non-West is even more flawed. Understandably, given the problems of scale that the issue poses for any one scholar, there has been a tendency to focus on only a few examples. Instead, however, of drawing the necessary attention to the problems this poses in terms of the typicality of the example and the appropriate need for caution, there is a tendency to treat the examples that are considered as ideal types and thus to neglect due caution. This is a serious problem with a recent work that has attracted considerable attention, John Lynn's *Battle*. Arguments for Western and Eastern ways of war are too vague and strained. Through a kind of lazy elision, there is a tendency to make China the exemplar for all Eastern ways of war, and then for all non-Western ones, just as a selective use of examples from, say, the history of Germany, France, Britain and the USA from 1650 became the model of the Western way. Even worse, they make the writer Sun Tzu the exemplar for all Chinese forms of war, through the same process. However, the notion of Western and Eastern ways of war also refer to sets of ideas which, if carefully defined, have somewhat more force: the idea of national ways of war and of strategic culture. If a group maintains the same body of ideas about force and interests, and the same conditions of power and enemies, for long periods of time, it may define the same range of options and make similar choices among them, create institutions of specific character and quality, use them in distinct ways, and follow a strategic style playing for a long game of attrition, for example, as against immediate knock out. Even so, these national ways of war will have variants and they will end when the circumstances do. For example, between 1700 and 1945 neither Britain nor Prussia/Germany always used their stereotypical ways of war, which ended when their strategic positions were transformed after 1945.

To argue, instead, the case for variety is to draw attention to the extent to which, at any one time, there was a multiplicity of relationships between West and non-West, a situation that remains the case. Indeed, this was true of the highpoint of Western imperialism, with the Italians defeated by the Ethiopians at Adua in 1896. In the 1890s, this battle was an isolated episode in so far as a Western defeat at this scale was concerned, but it also indicated a more general issue of the possibility of Western failure, as well, under some circumstances, as the limitations of Western force in the face of opposition.

Noting variety does not replace the need to consider trends and tendencies, but, at every stage, it is necessary to understand variety in order to avoid overly drawing conclusions from particular examples, a serious tendency in work on the global situation.

A related conceptual problem arises from the issue of deciding how far to place the emphasis for Western success (and therefore, by extension, failure) on combat, how far on conflict, and how far on the multitude of factors that helped provide structure and content for relations, including the capacity to create a syncretic religious solution (which was important to anchoring Spanish success in Latin America), the role of disease, or the capacity to win local military and political support. This is not an either/or question, but nor is it one that can be readily answered by saying that these 'other' factors consolidated the success brought by military means, a distinction that is too readily drawn.

The 'other factors' are crucial once the focus extends to the question of will. Conquest and control were not an extension of capability, but rested in part on the definition of goals and the determination to pursue them. At once, this draws attention to the issue of military tasking that is all-too-often underrated, in the

operational, technological, War and Society, and cultural interpretations, and also to the broader and related question of push for empire. Indeed, it is instructive, when considering explanations for Western imperial expansion, to recall the extent to which there was in 1947-75 a major withdrawal from empire, in part as a result of military resistance, but at a time when the capability gap between Western military powers and indigenous opposition was arguably greater than ever before.

The push for empire in part reflected possibility, notably the open frontier represented by the Atlantic and by superiority in Atlantic waters. There was, for example, no Moroccan or Algerine equivalent in European Atlantic waters to Ottoman pressure in the Balkans or the Mediterranean. As Algerine slave raids into British waters in the early-seventeenth century indicated, this was not a matter of the absence of any technological capability; and indeed the point can more broadly be made when considering the lack of sustained long-range East Asian naval activity. The contrast between Western and non-Western interest in long-range naval activity by the sixteenth century can only be pushed so far. Having conquered Egypt (1517) and Iraq (1534), the Ottomans, for example, scarcely turned their back on the Indian Ocean. Yet, in terms not simply of success, crucially Portuguese victories over Calicut, Egyptian, Gujarati and Ottoman fleets in the Indian Ocean between 1500 and 1538, but also of goals, there was a major contrast between the Western Europeans and non-Western powers.

This was a fundamental basis for Western expansion. Furthermore, between 1500 and 1700, the Europeans made major gains on their landward frontier with the non-West. This was not so much true of Europe itself, where the gains from the Turks in the late seventeenth century largely only reversed the losses of the early sixteenth century; and, even then, only incompletely so: Belgrade captured by the

Ottomans in 1521 was regained in 1688, 1717 and 1789, only to be lost in 1691, 1739 and 1791. Nor, by 1700, had there been any Russian advance at the expense of Persia, and indeed much of the advance in 1722-3 was to be reversed by 1735. However, the situation was very different both to the west of the Urals, where the Russian conquest of Kazan in 1552 was a major step, and thereafter to their east. As far as Siberia was concerned, the Russian advance there was a matter not only of one eastward eventually to the Pacific Ocean, but also to the south of this axis. This took the Russians into Central Asia and the Far East.

Yet, these achievements to the east of the Urals were peripheral, not only to Europe as a whole, but even to Russia itself. Russian rulers focused on struggle with Poland, Sweden and Muslim forces west of the Urals, whether those of Kazan, the Crimean Tatars or Ottoman forces themselves, and not on those further east. In large part, this was a matter of practicality, particularly as far as the Far East was concerned; but goals and priorities played a more significant role, and understandably so as Polish forces were able to seize Moscow in 1610-12.

Looked at differently, from 1450 until today, the world's greatest seapowers and navies always have been Western ones, with limited exceptions, for example Oman in the eighteenth century, the big exception of Japan from the late-nineteenth century, and India and China today. Also, since the 1900s, the world's greatest airpowers always have been Western states. This superiority in sea and airpower survived decolonization, although it may well fade over the next thirty years, as China and India become leading industrial states.

On the other hand, it has been less clear what this amounts to, and what can be achieved with sea and airpower. Between 1400 and 1600, seapower allowed Western states unprecedented access to the world as a whole, and in one place, the

Americas, European land forces and populations were able to conquer. But the situation was different elsewhere. European armies had no significant lead over those of Old World states, nor did they conquer large populations there; Siberia not having much of a population. Throughout the seventeenth century, the real phenomenon is of Old World states thwarting Western seaborne empires: Japan versus Portugal in the 1630s, China versus the Dutch in the 1660s, and the Mughals versus the British in the 1680s and 1690s.

Capability in power projection was less important than prioritisation, as was to be abundantly shown with Russia in 1695-1763. Then successive opportunities for conflict with the Turks were not pursued because of concerns about European power politics. Indeed, Russia's success in defeating Sweden in 1709, and again in 1742, and in overawing Poland was the precondition for the campaigning against the Turks in 1711, 1735-9, 1768-74 and 1787-92. In 1739, when the Russians were making major advances at the expense of the Turks, the French encouraged the Swedes to threaten Russia in order to distract them.

This element of prioritisation and the sequential nature of success also needs examination when considering the Western European powers. The French, English and Dutch as much, if not more, went to West Africa, the Caribbean and North America to fight each other or the Spaniards and Portuguese, as they went to fight non-Westerners. In large part, however, that was because other Westerners were the gatekeepers to the opportunities in these regions, but that was a product of Western power projection. Whereas the world of trade in the Indian Ocean and its littoral was shared between Western and non-Western merchants and polities, that was far less the case with the Atlantic.

Western strength in power projection remained the case to the present day, whatever the extent of military capability or territorial control on land. This power projection was the basis of Western power, however, not simply because of military factors, but also because the sea was the route for trade and migration. The former brought profit and opportunity and this encouraged investment, not least in navies and coastal positions, as means to protect and extend this trade. This commitment helped sustain transoceanic military tasking, but was not itself necessarily a product of relative strength on land vis-à-vis non-Westerners.

This point emerges from any consideration of the power-ratios of the slave trade, with the provision of slaves from Africa a matter not so much of raiding, although that did play a role, as of trade with local rulers, who were able to limit Western control of the African littoral until the second half of the nineteenth century. Given that this was four centuries after the arrival of Western ships along the coast, it is a little difficult to see the narrative of military history for Western Africa as one of Western success. Indeed, the Portuguese faced considerable difficulties in expanding their major African colonies, Angola and Mozambique, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while, in the nineteenth, the British found the Asante a formidable problem until the 1870s, and, even then, the British victory was in part dependent on local support from other tribes. As another instance of the mismatch between force projection and military achievement, or, indeed, endeavour, the Western ability to arrive in Chinese and Japanese waters in the early sixteenth century, seen initially with the Portuguese, did not mean an ability or drive to conquer or coerce until the mid-nineteenth.

Power projection should not be separated out too abruptly, and this was particularly true of settlement, for migrants depended as much on being able to sail

from Europe, as on the success in acquiring or seizing land for settlement. Again, the push factor was important, as migration flows varied greatly. This fed through into the extent of military strength on the periphery. Aside from the issue of local supplies for regular forces, much of the Western strength on the periphery, whether in the Americas (South and North, as well as the West Indies) or for example the Dutch colony of Cape Town, was a matter of colonial militias. The contrast between New France and the British colonies in North America is very instructive on this head. The far greater population of the latter meant that their capacity for raising local forces was much greater, and this was a strategic factor that was operationally significant, most clearly in the capture of Louisbourg in 1745.

Trade and land were no more polar opposites than co-operation or conflict with natives, but there was a degree of correlation. Where land for settlement was the goal then it was harder to win native support and therefore more necessary to rely on Western regular or (colonial) militia forces, as in North America and Australasia. Even in these cases, however, it did prove possible to win native support. This was important in conflict with Native Americans, and not only in the initial contact stages; and was also a factor in the Maori wars in New Zealand.

It proved far easier to win local support if the goals were sovereignty and/or trade rather than land for settlement. This greatly helped the British for example in India. The role of local support is generally subsumed into the overall analysis by emphasising the degree to which the resulting military capability resulted from the use of Western weaponry, drill and discipline. To a certain extent, however, this may be a matter of asserting a relationship, rather than analysing the subject. Instead, it is more appropriate to note the extent and variety of hybridisation between Western and non-Western practices. This is even more the case if due attention is devoted to

topics other than infantry deployments in battle; for example consideration of the early British use of native cavalry in India.

Battle certainly played a major role in the establishment of Western power, as indeed did siege, an operational goal and method that receives inadequate attention. The shifting periodisation of battle, from the early sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries, depending on the region being considered, is such that the character of the resulting battles varied greatly, and this underlines the need to have far more research on individual battles.

If firepower was a common characteristic, opponents sometimes deployed considerable firepower of their own, as with the Marathas in India against the British in 1803, most prominently at the battle of Assaye, which Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington) appears to have won, despite firepower considerations, by means of repeated infantry advances. Furthermore, allowing for general Western superiority in firepower, while it might provide a vital capability enhancement on the defensive, the situation on the offensive was more complex. It is necessary to move from the visual image of the first – the thin red line or square fending off large numbers of charging ‘others’ – to consider, instead, the reality of Westerners storming positions at bayonet point, as at Tel-el-Kebir in 1882. In such operations, morale, leadership and unit cohesion were more important than weapons, which directs attention to the organisational culture of specific militaries. More generally, this is an aspect of the revenge of the specific on the systemic that is such a feature of military history, and, indeed, of history more widely; but that makes it more difficult to arrive at conclusions.

A further complication arises from the need to consider non-Western expansionism, indeed imperialism, alongside their Western counterparts. This again

brings up the issue of variety, with such expansionism common in Africa and Asia, but not in the Americas or Australia. However, that remark can be sharpened up both geographically and conceptually. Areas that witnesses expansionism can be expanded to include New Zealand and Hawaii; but it is also necessary to emphasise the range of expansionism so as to include tribal warfare, as well as that more clearly associated with states. There is of course a continuum, but there is a clear difference between the Apache and China, such as there was between Highland clans and Prussia.

At the same time, it is necessary to avoid apparently axiomatic definitions of state identity and effectiveness when approaching this issue. If non-Western expansionism is understood in terms of technological advantage (for example with reference to the acquisition of firearms by coastal African states from the sixteenth century, or with regard to Egypt or Japan in the nineteenth century), then this has a methodological consequence as far as Western expansionism is concerned, and vice-versa. Detailed work on the non-Western situation is frequently lacking, not least from the perspective of the knowledge of the individual scholar. At the very least, there is a situation of considerable unevenness, in part due to the problems posed by the extent and nature of the surviving evidence, but also because of the focus of scholarly attention. More recent work, for example, has been devoted to Chinese expansion in the eighteenth century, than to its Burmese counterpart.

In looking at the non-Western material, it is clear that technology should no more be abstracted from political, cultural and social contexts than in the case of the West. These contexts help account for marked contrasts, both geographically and chronologically, in success and in the definition of success. In particular, there is a difference between the conquest/battle stage and its pacification counterpart. The

ability to prevent, limit or repress resistance is a crucial component of military history and one best understood in political terms. Tasking again emerges as important (how necessary was pacification and what was it supposed to entail), and so, in considering the response, were cultural factors.

In assessing cultural factors, it is appropriate to consider the organisational strength of particular governments. This can be seen as an aspect of Western success, with the organisational continuity of Western agencies and forces, such as the East India Companies, contrasted with the more personalised military-political systems of Indian rulers. This, however, has to be handled with care, as the same point about the East India Companies can be made about China, while the contrast between Poland and Turkey does not match the standard suppositions.

Nevertheless, accepting overlaps and parallels, there was a substantial difference between aspects of the West and the non-West. In particular, the organisational potency of expanding and affluent Western powers emerged in British success in South Asia: British financial credit, the expression of economic and fiscal strength and organisation, played an important role in securing Indian co-operation (and Anglo-Indian military strength). This credit helped the British create the military hybrid or synthesis important to British tactical and operational success, not least with the development of a cavalry able to provide mobility and to counter the consequences of that of their opponents, and with marked improvements in logistical capability.

Indian rulers tried for the same process of synthesis, but less successfully due to financial, organisational and political factors. These were both specific to military structures and more general. The former included the extent to which Indian armies relied on recruitment via semi-independent figures akin to the landed nobility of

medieval Europe, whereas the British East India Company relied on more direct recruitment, and treated officers as a professional body subject to discipline. British commanders and officers obeyed orders to a degree very different to that of Indian counterparts who were ready to change allegiances or try to seize independent power. A more general contrast was the greater ability of the Company to deploy funds and credit, thanks to its oceanic trading position.

These factors remained pertinent, and, indeed, are still so today. It is difficult to see much equivalence today between the organisational structures and ethos of countries such as Somalia and those of Western powers such as the USA, but the military consequences were very different in the heyday of Western power in 1890-1910 to the situation after 1945. The heyday was a highpoint of the period from the 1740s to 1940s, and, more precisely, the 1850s to 1940s, in which Western states had a meaningful and usable superiority on land increasingly against all comers, which underwrote the process of conquest in the Old World. Here again, there is the danger of conflating the variety of circumstances that comprise the non-West, but, a general theoretical conclusion that emerges is that factors that help provide a capability advantage or that cause success (the two are not synonymous) in one context, are not necessarily relevant in others. This makes processes, and therefore judgements, of causality more difficult.

Organisational factors are difficult to assess, as they relate to contrasts between Western and non-Western societies and states that are problematic. It could be argued that European armies had a crushing superiority over non-Western ones because, for centuries, their states regularly fought major wars against each other. Only the strongest survived, in a constant competition to improve armies. This end defined state finances, administration and politics. Compromises between

monarchs and nobles produced things unique to Europe: states which maintained the largest and best armies they could afford, controlled by an able but loyal officer corps. It could be argued that European states became the most militarised and militarily effective on Earth, although there were clearly very martial non-Western societies, which makes this argument problematic.

Nevertheless, at the level of major states, non-Western powers had to undergo a revolution if they wished to match the foundations of Western strength. In Europe, countries could maintain large armies without threatening their existence and become stronger simply by raising more revenues and regiments. Elsewhere, raising taxes created crises, and strengthening armies therefore weakened the state. To a considerable extent, old armies were ossified, and often they had to be destroyed before new ones could begin. Asian states westernised their armies only when they made that aim fundamental and could survive the crises it caused. The Westernization of armies strained their financial and administrative systems and provoked political crises, especially over the key issue of military and political command. Westernisation required a large and able officer corps with control of the armed forces, but this could overthrow its masters, as in Turkey and Persia. In Japan, in contrast, Westernisation followed a revolution, and officers were selected for loyalty to a regime. Yet, as Japan in the 1930s underlined, sooner or later every Westernising officer corps overthrew the regime that created it.

Alongside force and organisational factors, it is pertinent to note the role of political counterparts in encouraging the spread of Western power and, conversely, of the same in undermining it. The latter encourages a focus on the role of ideology and belief, in both periphery and metropole, in making rule by others seem aberrant rather than normative. This may appear far-distant from conventional military

history, but, instead, is crucial in the contrast between growing technological prowess on the part of the major powers and the more limited role they sought, and success they enjoyed, as imperial powers. The most successful – China in Tibet and Xinkiang – owed its success more to demographic weight and the opportunities it created for settlement, than to any military capability gap.

It is therefore appropriate to note that other factors have to be assessed alongside technology. Focusing solely on the latter, superiority in forms of military technology and military industrial complexes underwrote Western superiority in sea and air power, where their effect is fundamental; but precisely the same forms of superiority in technology and industry have a far smaller impact so far as land power goes. A fairly similar pattern is emerging with the so-called RMA today, though the latter does give Western armies more power in conventional battlefield than was seen between 1600 and 1850.

Dethroning technology from its central role in capability, let alone causation, and insisting, furthermore, that it be contextualised in socio-cultural terms, has obvious implications for the second of the lectures, on the late-twentieth-century Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). The two – the technological focus and the RMA – also demonstrate the need to understand the role of cultural assumptions in military analysis.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, more generally, J. Black, *Rethinking Military History* (London, 2004).

## CANADA AND THE USA: MILITARY HISTORIES

This essay seeks to discuss the military histories of Canada and the USA, both in order to make comparisons and to throw light on the idea of exceptionalism: unique military developments. The concept of exceptionalism is one that causes problems across the range of historical enquiry. As far as military history is concerned, it is an aspect of the diversity of circumstances and variety of developments that can be seen to play an important role, not least in subverting the frequent schematic attempts that are made to assert the existence of a single model. This process of schematicism by exceptionalism has been accentuated by the theoretical stress on cultural dimensions, particularly the ideas of cultural responses to conflict as well as organisational and strategic culture, as these are, by their nature, if they are to be analytically helpful, distinctive, and based on particular states.

The USA has attracted strong interest in so far as exceptionalism is concerned. This is linked to the longstanding debate about an 'American Way of War', a theme pushed hard by American scholars and one that looks back to the argument that America won independence because it rejected *ancien régime* notions of conflict, and that its distinctive socio-political system thereafter assured a continued difference. This supposed *sonderweg* [unique path] can be clarified through such explanation. Furthermore, the argument can be contextualised by considering other states. To focus on Canada might appear surprising, as, in considering the USA, contrasts are more commonly made with other leading powers, particularly nineteenth-century Britain. However, it is valuable to look at Canada alongside the USA, not only because it throws light on the latter, but also as it

indicates the extent to which a state that is not the leading power in the military system can still make a major contribution.

This was certainly the case with Canada from 1917 to the mid-1960s, a period in which Canada made a key contribution to world history, in which that contribution focused on war, and one that is largely neglected both in historical writing and in modern Canadian consciousness. This contribution can be divided into three episodes: Canada in World War One, Canada in World War Two, and Canada in the early years of NATO.

As far as World War One was concerned, the Canadian contribution was crucial in the last two years of the war. The Canadians had been engaged earlier – in the Ypres Salient in 1915, and the defence of Ypres in 1916, but the key engagements were in 1917 – Hill 70 and Lens, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele – and in 1918 – including at Amiens, Arras, the Canal du Nord, Cambrai, and in the final advance. The casualty rates were heavy. Of the men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment who came from St. Johns, nearly half sustained casualties, many on the first day of the battle of the Somme, and, as a result of the war, 15 per cent of the city's men between 18 and 32 were killed or injured.

In 1917 and, even more, 1918, however, Canadian units played a key role in the evolution of effective offensive tactics on the Western Front, particularly artillery-infantry coordination, and also in providing a key component in the drive for victory. The Canadian contribution in 1918 was particularly important. At that stage, the strategic situation was very critical, indeed far more so than in the last campaign of World War Two. Russia had been knocked out of the war, and its resources were now open to German exploitation. The USA had come into the war, but, as yet, only a portion of its military had been deployed in France and, partly due to inexperience,

their fighting effectiveness was modest, as their early operations showed. The French military was exhausted. As a consequence, British and Dominion forces played a key role in 1918, and, within them, the Canadians were crucial. More generally, Canada was also important during the war in the development of munitions production, in the supply of food to Britain, in the naval protection of North Atlantic maritime routes, and in the financial resourcefulness of the British imperial system.

In World War Two, Canada again played a crucial role, although the Canadian government was initially reluctant to provide troops for the Western Front, in part because of the heavy losses in World War One. Nevertheless, by the close of 1939, 23,000 men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division were in Britain. Canadian forces were particularly important in the crisis of 1940, when the British military and strategic situation collapsed, with the fall first of Norway and then of France. The British Expeditionary Force that returned to Britain, many from Dunkirk, was badly hit, without much *matériel*, and disorganised. In this situation, it was very important to have Canadian forces available to act as an operational reserve, able to counter any German invasion landing in southern England. Also in 1940, Canadian troops were deployed to occupy Iceland, helping to thwart the possibility that this Danish colony would become a German submarine base, and thus serve to threaten North Atlantic shipping routes, accentuating the strategic impact of the fall of Norway.

As the Canadian forces in 1940-1 rested on the defensive, their role is underrated in the popular consciousness, a characteristic problem with operational military history, especially if written with this consciousness in mind; but such defensive roles are vital. So also was the defensive role represented by convoy protection, which was more effective, although apparently more mundane, than the

interest in hunter-killer tactics. The Canadian navy focused on convoy protection, rather than the big-ship capabilities and surface ship-killing tasks of the British and American navies. Although less dramatic than the latter, the Canadian role was vital. The rapidly-expanded navy became the third biggest in the world, and, without its effort, it would have been impossible to maintain maritime routes across the Atlantic in the face of a savage submarine offensive. Another aspect of the Canadian war effort that tends to be overlooked was the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which was established in 1939, and which became the key location for training. Defensive functions, however, were not always happy, as Atlantic naval losses indicated. These losses continued after the advantage was gained in the submarine war in the second quarter of 1943. Canadian warship losses in 1944-5 included the *Regina*, *Shawinigan*, *Clayoquot*, *Trentonian*, *Guysborough* and *Esquimalt*, while submarines sunk by the Canadians included U283, 247, 257, 309, 342, 448, 477, 478, 484, 575, 621, 625, 678, 744, 772, 845, 846, 877, 971, 980, 984, 1003, 1006, 1225, and 1302. Furthermore, imperial defence led to the loss of 2,000 Canadian troops when the outnumbered, exposed and vulnerable garrison of Hong Kong fell to the Japanese in December 1941.

The Canadians also played a major role in offensive operations. Political pressure to be seen to do something, in a context in which the Canadian government was unwilling to see troops deployed in the Mediterranean (where the other Dominion forces were sent), led the army to take a major role in the poorly-planned attack on Dieppe on 19 August 1941, in which the majority of the attacking force was killed, wounded or captured. More successful operations also involved heavy losses, including among the Royal Canadian Air Force as targets in north-west Europe were attacked.

In 1943-5, Canadian forces made an important contribution in the Italy campaigns, while, in 1944-5, they played a key role in those in north-west Europe, not least on D-Day, in the subsequent Battle of Normandy and in the difficult terrain of the Scheldt estuary (1944) and the lower Rhineland (1945). In total nearly 43,000 service personnel were killed. If this was fewer than the 61,000 who had died in World War One, that reflected in large part the different nature of land operations between the two world wars.

Canada's contribution to the Allied cause, as well as to the survival of Britain itself, in World War Two was far greater than its manpower. Crucial food and munitions were also provided, as was financial support. The Canadian government provided large amounts of money to Britain in grants and loans, and, per capita, the Canadians provided more assistance than the Americans.

In turn, the Canadians played a major role in the early years of NATO, particularly as France, Britain and Portugal were heavily engaged in imperial defence, while Germany had been disarmed. The Canadian contribution remained crucial until the late 1960s, when Canada began to make a smaller defence effort, while France and Britain re-centred their military efforts on Western Europe, and Germany by then had a substantial military.

An emphasis on the role of Canada serves as a reminder of the extent to which images of a nation's military trajectory can be misleading. In this case, in particular, current American criticism of Canada for neutralism and a lack of military vigour cannot serve to provide a reliable account of Canada's military past.

In turn, this invites attention to the position for other states. In the case of the USA, as of Canada, there is, for example, the misleading emphasis on the volunteer

military tradition and the citizen soldier, and the related critique of professionalism, an emphasis that was particularly strong in the nineteenth century, and that still had echoes in the twentieth. The regular American army was always much bigger than its Canadian counterpart, while the American navy rose to be a serious navy between 1890 and 1920 and therefore its nature became different to that of the American army to some degree. From 1940, the American army became a great professional force, although at that time, the Canadian forces also moved from being primarily militia-based to becoming a permanent regular institution.

The variable nature of the historical interpretation of American military history is not simply a matter for scholars, but, instead, is more centrally located first in public history and, secondly, in political clashes past and present. In the case of the USA, these proved stronger than in Anglophone Canada, although once the Québec dimension is added, the situation is very different. From the outset, there was division within the USA over the direction of military policy, and this was centrally linked to anxieties about the character of the republic. Support for a strong military was seen as betokening centralist, indeed autocratic, tendencies, and as un-American. In contrast, the Federalists pressed the case for thinking of America as threatened by Britain, France and Spain, and therefore as needing a strong defensive capability. Jefferson was particularly associated with the first view and Hamilton with the second.

This tension persisted, albeit in different forms, in the nineteenth century, being reshaped in response to events and their perception, for example the War of 1812. A major difference over the role of regulars as opposed to militia was seen then and over the following decades. This was related to criticism of West Point as a

European-style institution, and to differences over foreign policy, not least the desirability of expansionism within North America.

To a considerable extent, the public political dimension of differences over military tasking and force structure became less acute within the USA after the Civil War. During the following 140 years, there was more political consensus on these issues than in the first eighty years of the republic, in large part because of widespread support for (eventual) participation in the two World Wars and the Cold War, all of which were made more acceptable by presenting them in the light of defensive moves in response to aggression, the approach also adopted in the extrapolation of the reaction to the 2001 attacks into a War on Terror. However, the potential for dispute within American public culture and the political system remained high as was shown, for example, by the eventual response to large-scale engagement in the Vietnam War.

The situation was very different in Canada, although there was a contrast between military mobilization in Québec and in Anglophone Canada in both world wars. This was very much seen in the 1942 conscription plebiscite, where the no vote was 73% in Québec, and, in contrast, a peak in the no vote of 30% elsewhere (in New Brunswick) and only 16% in Ontario.

Political difference can also be seen in terms of the use of force in domestic politics. This was most obvious in the case of the American Civil War (1861-5), and, compared to that, the situation was very different in Canada. The contrast might have been less apparent had Québec separatism gone further, and, from a Québec perspective, force, or the threat of force was applied: in the original conquest of French Canada in 1758-60 most obviously, as well as in the nineteenth century, when troops were deployed during the Fenian raids crisis, and, more recently, when

the prospect of force was an aspect of the debate over Québec separatism. Indeed, in the 1960s, this led to interest in the acquisition of wheeled personnel carriers by the army, and to comparable preparations for countering civil disobedience.

In the absence of such action, however, the use of force was relatively modest. Troops were employed against the Métis, and, more centrally, there was deployment of troops against strikers in the 1890s-1920s. This was particularly true of the widespread labour activism in 1919, especially in Winnipeg. Thereafter, the use of the military was modest, and most of the strikes were not met by violence. Nor was there any equivalent in Canada to the deployment of regular troops to further civil rights in the 1950s in the USA, or to the use of National Guard forces in response to ethnic rioting in the 1960s. This difference can be emphasised or, conversely, the stress could be on the limited use in both countries from the 1970s. For example, in 1992, troops were not deployed in the face of the serious Los Angeles riots.

Mention of similarity in some aspects, however, has to take note of fundamental differences. Canada was part of an imperial military and political system. This entailed far more co-operation than is often appreciated. This was seen, in particular, first in the defence of Canada against real or potential American attack, and, subsequently, in the major role Canada played in the two world wars. The emphasis is generally on Canada coming to independence with, in particular, stress on the delay in declaring war on Germany in World War Two, but the reality from far earlier was of the shared responsibilities that were an aspect of an imperial system that rested, for its land forces, on such co-operation. This was particularly important in the British imperial system due to the small size of the British regular army and the reluctance to turn to conscription.

Allowing for this, the contrast with the USA, an independent state from 1776, is readily apparent. Furthermore, American independence was amplified, first, by America's tendency to shun participation in military alliances prior to 1917 and, secondly, by its major rise in population and economic strength, such that, whatever the per capita commitment, the Americans were able to devote resources that were far greater in aggregate terms than those of Canada.

This returns attention to the nature of exceptionalism but, again, it is possible to note repeated parallels between America and Canada in the twentieth century. Important elements include the possibility to emphasise power projection rather than home security, the generally peaceful nature of the Home Front, the need to adjust to the exigencies of alliance politics (a problem greater for Canada than for the USA), and the impact of socio-cultural changes on assumptions about war-launching and war-fighting. From these and other perspectives, it is indeed instructive for the historian to look at parallels between the two countries.

At the same time, a chronological perspective on these parallels suggests that exceptionalism has to be seen not as a set pattern of development, but as one that was open to change. In this perspective, it is readily apparent that there was no clear tasking for the American military or, indeed, for America as a major power. Instead, any consideration of the variety of tasks that had to be fulfilled, combined with the counterfactuals considered by contemporaries that might have enlarged this list, suggests that there was no distinctive American tasking, on land or sea, and thus leads to an emphasis on the protean character of the subject. In 1840-70, for example, there was war with Mexico and civil war, but conflicts with Britain and France were also possible, both linked to the Civil War and (Oregon question, Mexico) separate to it. The ability of the USA, like that of Canada or any other state,

to shape its military options, and thus accentuate and sustain distinctive features, has to be considered alongside a stress on the role of constraints in this development.

This underlines the complexity of factors involved, as well as the need to discuss American (or Canadian) developments not in terms of a clear contrast with those of Europe but rather as aspects of a diverse Western military history.

A major difference, however, is that Canadian forces always were more colonial in their mentality, both in the sense that they draw their inspiration for ideas about war and force structure from a predominant foreign model. Britain to 1945-50, and the USA increasingly thereafter: admittedly, however, that increasingly is normal for other western powers after 1950. Again, Canadian forces are always more alienated/marginalised from the dominant political system at home, as well. US ones often were subjectively marginalized from US politics, in the sense that soldiers often despised politicians, but never to the degree that they have been in Canada; and always, military institutions have been greater players in Washington decision making than have their Canadian equivalents. This had broader consequences. From the start, the USA always has believed it has external threats from which it must defend itself through force. It always has used its armed forces in a classic fashion as a tool of state, under its direct national control, to achieve hard headed state interests: the USA expanded across the continent from 1783 to 1900 because it defeated or overawed its neighbours. This occurred in the context of a world system which posed no threats to the USA until 1940, when the combination of real danger and its latent power forced the USA into abandoning isolationism and becoming the world's dominant state.

Canada, conversely, has never had to be a normal country. During the nineteenth century, it could never have defended itself against the USA; but Britain did so for us, in ways which were invisible to Canada. Meanwhile, as part of the imperial system, Canada loaned its forces to Britain, which meant that in both world wars, Canada immediately was drawn in (and resources tapped more intensively and faster) than did its isolationist neighbour; and per capita, mattered more in those wars than the USA did; and in 1917-18, mattered more absolutely on the Western Front than the American army did. Indeed, between 1940-60, Canada punched far above its weight in terms of military power, and diplomatic influence and it mattered to the world (e.g. Canada's significance in founding and establishing NATO). Since between 1900-1940, meanwhile, Canada also have been protected from external danger by its neighbour, which is its guardian and therefore its greatest threat.

Seen from a long term perspective, for the period 1816-2006, Canada has never had to defend its vital interests through power, nor could it. Canada does not use its forces explicitly to pursue state interests, outwith a policy of loaning them to some international organisation, be it the British Empire, the UN or NATO, which Canadians thought could maintain a liberal political and economic order across the world. Since Confederation, Canadians never have used Canadian forces in direct service of their interests, not even in the emblematic case of 1939. They define their interests as being those of the world community. In fact, thanks to co-operation with Britain and the USA, Canadians never have had to be responsible for their own security, yet power and strategy have been central to their survival. That is, Canadians actually mattered a lot and projected much power but never for simple reasons of state (or national) interest; and always this projection created political problems at home, especially re Quebec.

Admittedly, however, both the US and Canada have always found it hard to admit that their forces are being used to pursue narrow selfish interests; hence, there is a high degree of rhetoric surrounding the usage. Neither state likes to believe it is thinking or acting in a realist fashion, even when it is doing so.

Considering Canadian and American developments within a diverse Western tradition offers some guidance to the future, more particularly probably if that is seen in the long-term. However, politics is the art of the short-term, if not generally the episodic, and, from that context, it is the contrast in the public cultures of the two states that are readily apparent. Although isolationism retains a powerful purchase in the American public, government is able to draw on support for commitments presented as necessary, and it is not essential to locate these in multilateral envelopes. The post-1945 Canadian public culture of force has been different, and this contrast has to be set alongside the possibility suggested above of discerning similarities at the functional level. Yet, an emphasis on the way in which events can shape military cultures underlines the extent to which there is nothing fixed in apparent national differences and invites a sense of indeterminacy when considering the future.