

Introduction

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AL QAEDA'S ATTACK AGAINST THE UNITED STATES ON September 11, 2001, was a matter of choice. There was no apparent necessity for al Qaeda to attack innocent civilians on such a scale within U.S. borders. By this attack, al Qaeda chose to escalate sharply a conflict that it had already declared was a war against the West. Once the attack was carried out, a war against al Qaeda by the United States and its liberal democratic allies was next to inevitable.¹ But what kind of war would it be, how would it be fought, for how long, and what would it cost in lives and money? None of that was known. The impending war would not be a conventional interstate conflict fought in the familiar interstate way. The rules of interstate war, never perfectly followed, would be hard to apply in a "war against terror." Some said that the old rules did not apply and were better done without. The gloves were off. The old ways of war had to change. But what did that mean? Now more than ten years later, we should be able to ask and answer (at least in part) the question: How did 9/11 change our ways of war?

Our approach to answer this question is holistic. Rather than examine our responses to the wars on terror through a single lens, looking only at strategic choices made, tactics employed, or mobilization plans, we employ multiple theories and methods, across a range of concerns, expecting to learn more from an examination of the whole than we could learn from examining the parts alone. Moreover, we assume that the wars on terror do not only challenge our military capabilities. They also challenge our commitments

to the values of liberal democracy. So our concerns are both normative and instrumental. We want to know how ways of war have adapted to fight terrorism. We also want to know how fighting terrorism has affected our capacity to protect and sustain liberal democracy at war. These dimensions are related.

Ways of War

The phrase “way of war” has no simple agreed-upon definition. Liddell Hart first used the term in 1927 to describe a British way of war based on maritime and economic power supporting expeditionary missions, quite different from the mass continental forces Britain used to fight in the world wars.² The phrase was made popular in Russell F. Weigley’s historical study of American war fighting, published in 1973. Weigley used it to identify a U.S. strategic preference for fighting wars of attrition or annihilation rather than fighting wars with limited aims or employing preventative strategies of deterrence. The idea has merit, if we do not stretch it into a deterministic claim that nations *only* fight certain wars in certain ways. Nations—and perhaps even non-state belligerents like al Qaeda—*do* possess political cultures that predispose them to fight certain wars in certain ways. But there is always a possibility for adaptation and change. Weigley recognized, for instance, that the American ways of war were modified by Cold War threats to the country’s values and interests, threats that could not be met by pursuing military victories in a “total war.”³

What a way of war refers to may be narrowly or broadly drawn. Narrowly, it refers to beliefs about how to fight and prevail on the battlefield. This is what Max Boot had in mind in 2003 when he extolled a new American way of war, based on speed, maneuver, flexibility, and surprise, with increased reliance on special operations forces and precision-guided munitions. He thought this new way of war had proved itself in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2001 to 2003. It would be “more effective and more humane” than a “grinding strategy of attrition.”⁴ More broadly, the term encompasses beliefs about when and how to use armed force in ways that are accepted (or not) as legitimate by the larger society. This is the approach Martin Shaw took in his study of what he called the new Western way of war. This way of war minimized military casualties to maintain domestic support for war yet in doing so increased the risk of civilian injuries and of civilian dead in the war zone.⁵ What distinguishes the narrow from the broad approach is an explicit concern for the relationship

between the use of armed forces and the normative evaluations of their use by the larger society.

The broad approach is used here as we consider whether our ways of war since 9/11 protect and sustain values central to a liberal democratic society. Notice that the reference is limited. All ways of war are not considered, only “our” ways of war, meaning specifically the ways of war of the United States, Britain, and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations, primarily as employed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11. Some chapters in this book refer to theories of general or even universal application and sometimes to events involving countries, regions, or actors other than members of NATO. But these are exceptions and they are made in support of the book’s main purpose—to see how 9/11 changed our ways of war and why it matters for liberal democracies.

Three Major Themes

We pursue our aim by addressing three major themes: What factors shape strategic decisions to go to war? How should force be used to wage war? What resources are mobilized to carry on the fight? These themes are not unique to war after 9/11. They pose questions that arise in any war. Will decisions to go to war seem justified, setting achievable goals for good reasons? Can war be fought in a way that appears to be both militarily effective and fair? Where will the resources needed to wage war be found? Will the costs of war—the sacrifice—be equitably distributed? What matters to us is how these questions are answered in this age of terror and unconventional wars. To begin, this section discusses briefly why each of these themes is important. The following section outlines the plan of the book. It considers what each chapter contributes to our understanding of key issues raised by one of our major themes. Taken together, they weave a complex tapestry of responses to our central question about the changing ways of war since 9/11.

Choosing War

Less than a month after 9/11, Congress authorized and President Bush ordered military action against Afghanistan, which had provided a safe haven for al Qaeda to plan, prepare, and pursue its program of terror. The decision to go to war was swiftly made and long supported by public opinion, at least in the West, though more so in the United States than elsewhere. If the public now

shows signs of being war-weary, that is only after more than a decade of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the conflicts not yet fully resolved and prospects for achieving success far from clear. Looking backward to a time when hopes for success were high, it may seem that what happened after 9/11—a mobilization to fight two wars—was inevitable or at least unsurprising. The United States, with its allies, did what great powers do: it took military action to punish those who attacked it and to keep them if possible from doing so again. What state with the power has chosen to do otherwise?

Nevertheless, the decision to go to war was not inevitable. The question remains why some alternatives were selected and others were not. While 9/11 was a surprise attack, it was not al Qaeda's first attack against the United States nor was it al Qaeda's first attack on American soil. Using force against al Qaeda to take out its leadership and close down its operation was already a matter of policy. At issue then was how much of what kind of force was needed to achieve particular ends. The question was especially heated in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. The U.S. public's mood at the time was punitive and its first thoughts were about how to bring al Qaeda to justice.

Using Force

Decisions to wage war also entail discussions about how to fight. Ideally in liberal democracies, such discussions are public. Public deliberation about the methods of war is especially important when the methods are untested, not known to be reliable, or are likely to provoke ethical criticism. But in practice, of course, public deliberation about how to wage war is usually quite restricted. Leaders invariably make crucial decisions behind closed doors. The public is not fully informed about decisions made or the reasons for them. Democracy's need for publicity is subordinated during war to its need for secrecy. Secrecy is often justified by realistic fears that disclosing methods of operation give an advantage to the enemy.

However necessary secrecy may be, political and military leaders run the risk of public criticism—or, even worse, the loss of public support—should their methods of war fail to bring the hoped-for results. Public disclosure and accountability are hard to avoid. Once the atom bomb was dropped, even the Manhattan Project became public knowledge, sparking debate about the use of force that has not yet subsided. Yet, apart from the logic that says loose lips sink ships, there is a deeper problem. Since the end of the world wars at least, there has been no simple instrumental connection between the use of

force and the achievement of national security objectives. Modern weapons are now so powerful that their unlimited use is self-defeating.⁶ But if the use of force must be limited, what should the limits be and how are they to be enforced? Can those we fight (or can we) be counted on to follow rules in a conflict where the rules are disputed and there is no confidence that rule followers are likely to succeed? This is a conundrum political and military leaders cannot escape.

Mobilizing Resources

Whether and how to fight are often matters affected by the ability of state, or nonstate, belligerents to mobilize the people and money required to support a particular way of war. It is not easy to know what resources might be needed. Those planning for war must ask whether the conflict will require a large or small armed force, of professional soldiers, citizen soldiers, or private contractors, for a war of long or limited duration, fought with high-technology weapons from a distance or face-to-face, literally among the people. Answers to these questions affect how much money and how many people may be needed for the fight.

Planners sometimes make mistakes: often they are overly optimistic, underestimating what will be required. The result is a military that is undermanned, underfunded, and therefore under strain when called on to fight. But even if planners make no mistakes, political and military leaders may not get the resources they want. This is true for the obvious though trivial reason that the supply of resources is always constrained. More important is that fighting limited unconventional wars make it unexpected and difficult to meet demands for resources not traditionally employed for military purposes. In the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, these resources range from the intelligence of anthropologists who are steeped in a local language and culture to the technical skills of hackers able to mount or prevent cyberattacks.

Plan of the Book

A central premise of this book is that military and political leaders make choices that affect when and how military force is used in pursuit of national security objectives. Yet, also assumed is that the choices leaders make are not entirely free. They are more or less constrained by the context in which choices are made. The chapters that follow each consider how 9/11 shaped

the context within which choices were made about whether, why, and how to fight “wars on terror.” They also assume that whatever effects 9/11 may have had were themselves shaped by a prior and ongoing discussion about what protects national security and what sustains the values or moral principles for which liberal democracies fight. Taken altogether, when the contributors consider how 9/11 changed our ways of war, they depict a complex interaction between a neorealist concern for power and interests and a sociological concern for the operation of moral principles and ethical norms.⁷

To clarify presentation of the argument, the book is divided into three issue areas, with each area focused on one of our three major themes, the first being the choice to go to war. The three contributors to this opening section adopt distinct and seemingly incompatible perspectives.

Andrew J. Bacevich, in the next chapter, advises us to see that the decision to go to war after 9/11 was not something new. It was a historically typical response by the United States to a threat, a typical response that the United States shared with Israel. It rests on the old idea that military force can solve problems encountered in the pursuit of national security objectives. He contends that faith in this idea has elsewhere declined since 1945. Rather than win victories, this military principle of action has led to out-sized military spending and a succession of tactical fads, no one of which succeeds. With 9/11 the typical response was invoked again, but this time, Bacevich hopes, it was the swan song for a way of war best forgotten.

In sharp contrast with Bacevich’s stand, Stephen Biddle and Peter D. Feaver, in chapter 2, defend policies adopted immediately following and in response to 9/11, to elevate terrorism from a secondary to a highest-order threat that justified going to war in Afghanistan. These were reasonable decisions for which there were no obviously better policy alternatives, a conclusion they support after considering what might have happened if an alternative policy had been pursued. While the 9/11 attacks were unexpected, they did not prevent the government from quickly adopting and implementing (what seemed to be) an instrumentally rational national security policy. This is not to say that the choice was unconstrained. As they note, public response to terrorist attacks created political pressures to choose war no matter what.

In chapter 3, Ronald R. Krebs considers this matter in greater depth. He argues that 9/11 sharply constrained national security debates about how to make sense of and respond to the terrorist threat. The response was not just military but was also rhetorical. Soon after 9/11, the president constructed a

“terrorist narrative.” His aim was to make sense out of the attacks by showing where they stood in the light of American history and its value commitments. The narrative portrayed terrorists as enemies of freedom, and it said that the United States had a special calling to defeat these enemies, by force if necessary. The importance of the narrative lies with the constraints placed on national security discourse; there was no room for views or policies not implied by it. Krebs asked whether this constrained discourse made the U.S. response to 9/11 less reasonable than it might have been had a more wide-ranging discussion been encouraged.

The second issue area focuses on how force is or should be used. In chapter 4, Joseph Soeters compares the ways of war adopted by the British military with those of the Dutch and asks which was more effective in post-9/11 conflicts. The British way of war emphasizes (as Achilles might) the use of force to achieve security goals. The Dutch way of war emphasizes (as Odysseus might) the use of cunning and guile to achieve security goals, with a minimum amount of force used. The analysis is complex, comparing the two militaries in military deployments conducted before and after the 9/11 attacks. But the theoretical claim is clear: insurgencies like those encountered after 9/11 are conflicts better met by limited military operations than by operations that use force as the primary means to mission success.

In chapter 5, Christopher Dandeker argues that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began in response to 9/11. They represented the height of Western confidence that military force could defeat threats posed by terrorists like al Qaeda and rogue states like Iraq or Afghanistan under the Taliban. Experience in Iraq and Afghanistan undermined that confidence. In these two cases, even modestly defined military success has been difficult to prove, while the costs of interventions have been obviously high. Western leaders are now reluctant to undertake further military interventions, a reluctance reinforced by current economic constraints. Should leaders intervene anyway, the effort will be strictly limited, as it was in Libya in 2011. Neither political elites nor the public at large back large-scale military interventions like those that flowed from 9/11. Support for such missions has come to an end.

Questions about how to fight are not simply expedient, based on whether we could achieve our goals. After 9/11, questions about how to fight also assumed a moral dimension, which I address in chapter 6. The chapter reviews the evolution of the Bush administration’s controversial policy to allow what it called “harsh interrogation” policies to meet the new terrorist threat. Rather

than ask whether the policies were justified, the chapter examines the harm done to those directly involved, to public servants in government, to the institutions of civil society, and to the “moral status” of the United States in the international community. The Obama administration stopped use of “harsh” interrogation techniques, but the harm done has not been fully acknowledged, investigated, or redressed. After 9/11, protections against the state’s use of torture were weakened. Since 9/11 checks on presidential power to use torture have been only partially restored. There is little public or elite pressure to do more.

The final issue area addresses the problem of mobilizing resources, which was surprisingly hard to do after 9/11. In chapter 7, Gerhard Kümmel argues in general that, when confronted with a trauma like 9/11, the leading institutions in a field will be the first to adapt to novel circumstances. Applied to military institutions, after 9/11, he expects that the United States will establish patterns of response that others will adopt; where the United States leads the rest will follow. There is some evidence to suggest that this leadership effect occurs. But the effect is not observed when it comes to trends in defense expenditures. Measured globally, defense expenditures increased sharply after 9/11, yet there is no support for the idea that the United States was setting an example. On the contrary, even within NATO, increases in defense expenditures were concentrated in the United States. Others did not follow. The findings suggest that states have difficulties raising money to pay for military interventions, even when 9/11 provided a reason for doing so.

In chapter 8, Deborah Avant documents that military planners sharply underestimated the number of ground troops needed to deal with the insurgencies that arose after Saddam Hussein and the Taliban were toppled. To make up for personnel shortfalls, the Bush administration increased reliance on private military contractors far beyond what was expected. This experience raises questions about future mobilizations, especially if reliance on private contractors becomes a means for meeting demands that sharp cuts be made in defense spending. This would be a radical innovation in U.S. military organization and culture. Its effects might debase the strong tradition upholding the role of the citizen soldier.

In chapter 9, Pascal Vennesson asks why the post-9/11 wars were fought in a limited way, though the rhetoric was strident on both sides and seemed to invite unlimited war. He argues that war was limited because neither side could mobilize “the people” to fight. Difficulty mobilizing people to fight is

easiest to understand in the case of al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was a global terrorist movement without any territory of its own, and its strategy envisioned a way of war that did not require mass mobilization of the people. Something similar can be said of the United States. Its reticence to mobilize people for war was partially a product of new tactics of war that focused on speed and maneuver, special operations forces, and precision-guided missiles and did not require large-scale mobilization. More important, Vennesson suggests, was a decades-long and growing erosion of trust and commitment between political leaders and the people, weakening the resolve to serve by the people and the courage of leaders to ask for their service. He wonders what is the cost to a democratic political culture if the United States and other democratic states cannot mobilize people to bear war's sacrifice.

To conclude, the final chapter offers an analytic assessment of the ways 9/11 changed beliefs about when and how to use armed forces. A central finding is that post-9/11 conflicts undermined previous confidence in the use of force as a tool for achieving foreign policy objectives. There was instead enhanced recognition of the limits encountered when using force. These limits arose from the difficulty of connecting the use of force with the ends of policy. Without that connection war is not instrumentally rational. The chapter also considers the implications of 9/11 for waging future wars. The topic is urgent. As I write these words, civil war ravages Syria, Iran and North Korea still pursue their goal to become nuclear powers, and political turmoil in Egypt unsettles what was the year before a peaceful and hope-filled Arab Spring. It is important to assess whether the experience and lessons from 9/11 are of historical interest only or may be applied more generally in a world already facing new outbreaks of collective violence.

Conclusion

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 led to a choice for war shaped by rhetoric distrustful of open democratic debate. Once war began, decisions about how to use force could not be tied reliably to the aims force was meant to achieve. The result was a crisis for the democratic control of war. Public doubts grew over whether military forces could be successfully deployed. Of course, Western states will not abandon the use of force if its use is seen as a necessary and a last resort. But they have been chastened by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those wars have been so costly and they are not yet finally over. Western

states will be reluctant to enter another large-scale ground war as a means of imposing their will. They will ask how else armed forces can protect and sustain democratic values in an era of terror and asymmetric war.

Notes

1. Going to war was not strictly inevitable. Early in the fall of 2001, some warned against a policy of war, preferring instead to rely on an international police operation. Among them was the highly respected British military historian, Sir Michael Howard, as was reported in the *Guardian* at the time. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/oct/31/afghanistan.highereducation> (accessed May 21, 2012). Still, the political pressures to go to war were so great as to make any policy other than war difficult to choose. For more on this, see chapters 2 and 3 in this volume.

2. Hew Strachan, "Strategy in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Changing Character of War*, ed. Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 505; Brian Holden Reid, "The British Way in Warfare: Liddell Hart's Idea and Its Legacy," *RUSI Journal* 156 (December 2011): 70–76.

3. Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). See also Brian M. Linn, "The American Way of War Revisited," *Journal of Military History* 66 (April 2002): 501–533.

4. Max Boot, "The New American Way of War," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (July–August 2003): 41–58.

5. Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War: Risk-Transfer War and Its Crisis in Iraq* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

6. Bacevich introduces this judgment in chapter 1. Soeters, Dandeker, and I treat the matter more deeply in our chapters. For classic statements of the argument, see Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960), chaps. 15 and 20; Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ Books, 1970).

7. For an extensive review of this theoretical approach, see Ward Thomas, *The Ethics of Destruction: Norms and Force in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).