

# How Military Change Affected Western States' Ability to End Conflicts Decisively

The twentieth century saw a significant change in the conduct of warfare. It also saw major change in the goals, strategies and structures of Western military organizations, defined as military change. This military change was primarily caused by strategic, technological and societal factors, which were not always aimed at improving the actual military capabilities of the states involved. In fact, military change influenced the ability of Western states to end their conflicts decisively during the second half of the twentieth century. The changing character of warfare and the influence of national politics on the conduct of military operations resulted in major change of national goals and strategies. Modern technology also caused significant change in the way Western militaries operated and organized themselves. Third and last were societal factors such as shifting norms and enhanced media coverage that caused major change for Western militaries. Together these factors reduced the ability of Western states to end conflicts decisively.

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*'I am tempted to declare dogmatically that whatever doctrine the Armed Forces are working on now, they have got it wrong. I am also tempted to declare that it does not matter that they have got it wrong. What does matter is their capacity to get it right quickly when the moment arrives.'*  
Sir Michael Howard, 1973

The twentieth century was one of the bloodiest and costliest known in military history. It witnessed two World Wars and numerous smaller conflicts ranging from small

domestic revolutions to large-scale conventional wars between states. The character of warfare however changed significantly between 1900 and 2000 and this in turn changed the outcome of most conflicts. During the first half of the twentieth century Western states obtained several very decisive victories, decisive in the sense that major change in the political, economic, and social structures of the territories was involved.<sup>2</sup> This did not just apply to conventional conflicts but also to unconventional ones such as the Boer War.<sup>3</sup> After the Second World War this changed significantly: conflicts became more unconventional and generally ended with a return to the status quo or even failure for the Western states, despite having acquired the most technologically advanced military hardware ever invented.<sup>4</sup> This lasted for the entire second half of the

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1 Sir Michael Howard, 'Military Science in an Age of Peace', in: *Royal United Services Institute Journal* (March 1974) 7.

2 Thomas X. Hammes, 'Insurgency: Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation', in: *Strategic Forum*, No 214 (2005) 2.

3 Albert Grundligh, 'The Bitter Legacy of the Boer War', in: *History Today*, 49:11 (1999).

4 Hammes, 'Insurgency', 2.



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The first half of the century was dominated by large-scale industrial and conventional warfare, or even total war, with conflicts fought by mass conscript armies

twentieth century and continued during the first decade of the 21st century, which even saw an exponential growth in conflicts other than conventional war.<sup>5</sup>

Looking at these results and comparing them with the first half of the century, something must have changed for Western militaries during the second half. The main question this essay sets out to answer is how military change has influenced the ability of Western militaries to achieve a decisive victory over their opponents between 1945 and 2010. I use the definition that describes military change as 'major change in the goals, actual strategies, and/or structure of a military organization'.<sup>6</sup>

Traditional literature on military change generally focuses on theoretical principles such as organizational theory and on reasons why militaries would innovate or change.<sup>7</sup> Instead of thinking about what might drive military

change, this essay will focus on what actually caused change for Western militaries during the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Generally, the primary function of a military organization is to secure and defend the state and its interests.<sup>9</sup> It would therefore be logical that all military change is focused on how to best perform this function. However, this essay will demonstrate that Western militaries have undergone change for very different reasons. Although the reasons for

5 Ian Johnstone, 'Dilemmas of Robust Peace Operations', in Bruce D. Jones (ed.), *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* (New York, Center on International Cooperation, 2006) 1-14.

6 Theo Farrell & Terry Terrif, 'Introduction', in: Theo Farrell & Terry Terrif (eds.), *The Sources of Military Change*, (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2002) 5.

7 Barry R. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between the World Wars* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984) 7.

8 Janine Davidson, *Lifting the Fog of Peace: How Americans Learned to Fight Modern War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011) 16-17.

9 Theo Farrell & Terry Terrif, 'Conclusion', in: Theo Farrell & Terry Terrif (eds.), *The Sources of Military Change*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2002) 266.

military change are numerous, I will only focus on the three most important factors: strategic, technological and societal. These have the ability to both constrain and trigger military change and are intended to improve military capabilities.<sup>10</sup> Other factors which lead to military change for different reasons, such as identity and legitimacy for instance, are not considered in this essay. Although they contribute to secondary conditions of military performance, they are not primarily intended to improve actual military capabilities and their influence on the outcome of conflicts is therefore more limited.

### Strategic Conditions

The first and most important factor when looking at military change are the strategic conditions. These can be divided in military- and political-strategic conditions. The first outline the strategic picture in which a military has to operate such as a balance of power or presence of strategic threats. Political-strategic conditions such as national politics create the goals or conditions military operations have to achieve and adhere to. The next part of the essay will examine more closely to what extent strategic factors have influenced military change.

One of the most important strategic factors of the twentieth century was the changing character of warfare. The first half of the

century was dominated by large-scale industrial warfare, or even total war, in which the risks were often so high that the outcome of the conflict meant nothing less than the survival or ruination of the state.<sup>11</sup> The conflicts were largely characterized by conventional warfare, fought by mass conscript armies. Conventional warfare can be defined as a form of warfare between states that employs direct military confrontation to defeat an adversary's armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in government or policies.<sup>12</sup> This changed dramatically after the Second World War, with the first colonial wars of independence which resulted in an increasing incidence of unconventional warfare. No longer were large mechanized armies the solution to bring a conflict to a quick and decisive ending and the distinction between conventional and unconventional conflicts soon started to fade.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon required a completely new way of fighting wars which demanded a broad and coherent cooperation between both civilian and military actors.<sup>14</sup> Unconventional warfare was not new to most Western militaries, especially to former colonial powers such as Britain, France and the Netherlands. Western states however struggled as this way of war started to move towards the centre of conflict from the 1950's onwards.

Meanwhile, the Cold War forced Western states to keep their militaries ready for conventional war, because most countries perceived this to be the greater threat.<sup>15</sup> The end of the Cold War and diminishing budgets made Western militaries look for other reasons to justify their existence. Declining defence budgets also led to the abolishment of conscription and the creation of a professional, all-volunteer force in most Western countries. Furthermore, lacking an immediate opponent Western militaries broadened their primary function to include the promotion of stability and well-being.<sup>16</sup> Humanitarian and crisis operations were a direct result during the last decades of the twentieth century, because if militaries did not go 'out of area', they would go 'out of business'.<sup>17</sup> The rising prominence of humanita-

10 Ibid.

11 Hew Strachan, 'Total War in the Twentieth Century', in: Arthur Marwick, Clive Emsley and Wendy Simpson, *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914-1955* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001) 255-283.

12 Irregular Warfare; Joint Operating Concept (Washington, D.C., Department of Defense, 2007) 7.

13 Huba Wass de Czege and Richard Hart Sinnreich, *Conceptual Foundations of a Transformed U.S. Army*, Institute for Land Warfare, Paper 40 (Washington, D.C., Association of the United States Army, 2002) 6.

14 Eyal Ben-Ari, Kobi Michael and David Kellen, 'Introduction', in: Kobi Michael, David Kellen and Eyal Ben-Ari, *The Transformation of the World of War and Peace Support Operations* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2009) 1.

15 Deborah D. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994) 57.

16 Vladimir Petrovsky, 'Peace Operations as an Integrated Part of the UN Strategy for a More Secure Twenty-First Century', in: *Institutional Issues Involving Ethics and Justice* Volume III, 1-3.



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As operations in Afghanistan proved, politicians began demanding positive results faster even though it became harder to quantify success during counterinsurgency campaigns

rian, crisis and counterinsurgency operations also put a greater emphasis on legitimacy in military operations.<sup>18</sup> This had a significant effect on how armed forces were left to conduct their operations, because it also changed the political will and guidance.

The political guidance during the large-scale conflicts of the early half of the twentieth century was different in scale and more clearly defined than in the limited wars which were to follow.<sup>19</sup> The stakes were usually high and the survival of the state depended on the outcome of the conflict. Accordingly, the military leadership was given more authority. During

the Second World War for instance, the military leadership had a clear strategic goal in the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan. Additional political leadership was displayed at the strategic level in making decisions which affected the general course of the war, such as where to place the next operational move. However, decisions were not made before conferring with the military strategic leader-

17 Trine Flockhart, 'Cooperative Security: NATO's Partnership Policy in a Changing World', in: *DIIS Report*, 2014:01 (2014) 133.  
 18 John A. Lynn, 'Patterns of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency', in: *Military Review*, 85:4 (July-August 2005) 23.  
 19 Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War* (London: Yale University Press, 1995) 336.

ship at great length, as World War II demonstrated.<sup>20</sup> From the operational level down, the military leadership was largely left to decide upon the best options for conducting the war itself, in conventional as well as counterinsurgency operations as the British campaign in Malaya showed.<sup>21</sup> The political guidance during the conflicts of the second half of the twentieth century differed significantly from this.

As the twentieth century progressed and conflicts became more unconventional in nature, political oversight by Western decision makers increased accordingly. In contrast to the large conventional conflicts in which the public ranged on the side of the government, the irregular conflicts of the second half of the twentieth century proved to be a greater electoral risk.<sup>22</sup> During conventional war, the public is generally convinced of the necessity to take up arms because of the obvious risks to the territorial integrity of the state or the safety of the population. Public interest and support

started to erode as soon as conflicts moved towards parts of the globe where they no longer directly threatened the state itself.<sup>23</sup> This also resulted in politicians demanding positive results faster even though it became harder to quantify success during counterinsurgency campaigns.<sup>24</sup> The conflict in Vietnam and operations as recently as Afghanistan proved this.<sup>25</sup> Counterinsurgency and crisis operations however are often difficult to conclude within a narrow timeframe and usually require more resources than is politically accepted.<sup>26</sup> This resulted in goals and objectives which were less clearly defined, more complex and more subject to change, such as 'creating the conditions for democracy'.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, because of the electoral risks and political sensitivity of military operations, political leaders became more closely involved in the decision-making process of military operations as Vietnam demonstrated.<sup>28</sup> Strategic interference with the tactical level cumulated during the last decade of the twentieth and the early years of the 21st century during operations over the Balkans, Kosovo and Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> Civilian decision makers excluded targets from attack and set limits on which weapon systems could be used due to political restraints.<sup>30</sup>

The changing character of the conflicts during the twentieth century and the role decision makers played had a very significant influence on the goals and strategies of Western militaries. As conflicts and missions became more complex, so did the strategic objectives and goals. In the end, it was the civilian leadership that decided how to conduct military operations, thereby deciding strategy as well. The strategic influence therefore resulted in major change in the ability of Western militaries to conduct operations successfully.

## Technology

The second major contributing factor to military change during the twentieth century was technology. The century witnessed some very sophisticated military innovations such as the tank and the airplane. However, innovati-

20 Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy 1943-1944* (New York: Picador, 2007) 5-23.

21 Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1848-1960* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989) 141.

22 Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005) 75-76.

23 Adam J. Berinsky, 'Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites and American Public Support for Military Conflict', in: *Journal of Politics*, 69:4 (2007) 975-978.

24 Maj. Douglas D. Jones, *Understanding Measures of Effectiveness in Counterinsurgency Operations* (Fort Leavenworth: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2006) 24-32.

25 Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1984) 186; Christ Klep, *Uruzgan: Nederlandse Militairen op Missie (Uruzgan: Dutch Soldiers on Mission) 2005-2010*, (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2011).

26 James Kiras, 'Irregular Warfare: Terrorism and Insurgency', in: J. Baylis, C. Gray and J. Wirtz (eds.) *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 215.

27 Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2006) 270-276; Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 336; James Meernik, 'United States Military Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy', in: *Journal of Peace Research*, 33:4 (1996) 391-398.

28 Craig M. Cameron, 'The U.S. Military's 'Two Front War', 1963-1988', in: Theo Farrell & Terry Terriff (eds.), *The Sources of Military Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2002) 128; Mark Clodfelter, *Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989) 76-88.

29 James Clay Thompson, *Rolling Thunder: Understanding Policy and Programming Failure* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) 155-156; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001) 10-11.

30 Michael O. Beale, *Bombs over Bosnia: The Role of Airpower in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Maxwell: Air University Press, 1997) 43-44.



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*New developments, such as the F-117 'stealth' fighter and precision-guided munitions, proved their worth during the Gulf War of 1991 and caused a tremendous confidence in modern technology among political and military leaders*

ons like these do not automatically lead to military change;<sup>31</sup> this is only the case when new technology also leads to a shift in tactics, doctrine and/or organization.<sup>32</sup> Tanks and aircraft in Germany provide a good example. Both were developed and deployed during the First World War as tactical innovations, but did not cause significant military change at the operational or strategic level. The combination of mechanized units and aircraft in the Blitzkrieg doctrine however meant a significant change in tactics, doctrine and organization for the German army. The next part of the essay will look more closely at how technology influenced military change, especially during the second half of the twentieth century.

From the Second World War onwards, there was a greater emphasis on the use of advanced technology in warfare. This led to a doctrinal focus on mechanized warfare and manoeuvre. The focus found its origins in the fact that it was exactly this type of warfare that had led to the Allied victory over Germany and Japan.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the drive towards new and more

complex military technology continued even after the war was over as Soviet conventional forces started to pose a new threat.<sup>34</sup> For this reason most Western nations kept their focus on the conventional way of war. Although there were few exceptions, this technological and doctrinal bias caused Western militaries to fight several unconventional conflicts in a conventional way.<sup>35</sup> One of the most well known examples of the twentieth century is the conflict in Vietnam. The U.S. Army's efforts in trying to win

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- 31 William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society since AD 1000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) 185.
- 32 Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, 'Introduction', in: Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 4-5; Williamson Murray, 'Armored Warfare: The British, French and German Experiences', in: Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, 6-7.
- 33 Capt. Jonathan M. House, *Towards Combined Arms Warfare* (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984) 144.
- 34 Martin van Creveld, *Technology and War: From 2000B.C. to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1991) 236; Phil Williams, 'Europe, America and the Soviet Threat', in: *The World Today*, 38:10 (1982) 372-381.
- 35 Robert M. Cassidy, 'The British Army and Counterinsurgency', in: *Military Review*, 85:3 (2005) 56.

the war by large search-and-destroy operations were unsuited for a conflict which was largely fought among the population.

After the Cold War, the focus on conventional operations remained, even though the number of counterinsurgency operations was rising.<sup>36</sup> It also meant that Western militaries kept looking for technologically advanced weaponry that would be useful in a conventional war, while military training remained primarily focused on conventional warfare based on manoeuvre doctrine.<sup>37</sup> This resulted in military commanders still talking in conventional terms about destroying the enemy during counterinsurgency operations as recently as Afghanistan,<sup>38</sup> which partially explains the lack of military success Western states have had during the twentieth century. Highly technological and lethal weapons designed to take on a territorially bound conventional opponent were used to combat irregular opponents.<sup>39</sup> This also had deceptive consequences, because too much attention for the development of high technology that was successful at the tactical level, actually degraded Western states' abilities to deal with less sophisticated enemies and irregular opponents such as the Vietcong or Taliban at the operational and strategic level.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the most sophisticated developments in military technology took place during the last two decades of the twentieth century, with information technology playing a big role in innovations and improvements. Some military thinkers went as far as calling it a 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA),<sup>41</sup> characterized by advancements in surveillance and reconnaissance technology, the availability of modern Command & Control systems and the use of precision-guided munitions.<sup>42</sup> Its proponents claimed these would reduce the fog of war and make manoeuvre forces and firepower faster and more accurate, while increasing the lethality and efficiency.<sup>43</sup> The ultimate goal of RMA was the domination of the battlespace. A number of nations quickly followed this American range of ideas because it promised greater firepower and effectiveness. It also was a politically attractive concept, because it promised to be more affordable with less personnel.<sup>44</sup>

The first real test of the RMA concept came in 1991 with the liberation of Kuwait. The exceptional results from the operations in the Gulf caused a tremendous confidence in modern technology among political and military leaders. Modern technology like precision-guided munitions provided military leaders with the operational flexibility to tailor operations according to political limitations.<sup>45</sup> At the same time it proved it could end a conflict quickly and at relatively low cost in human lives. Desert Storm was an exception when looking at the character of the conflict however: it was a conventional fight between two unequal opponents, both using conventional weapon systems. In the decade that followed, the character of most conflicts was quite different, as the Balkan crisis was soon to show. The RMA concept is very suitable in a conflict where there is a recognizable battlespace that can be dominated. In most unconventional conflicts or peace support operations however, there is no such recognizable battlespace.

Modern technology was thought of as a solution to many problems. Operationally it was possible to gain the same results with less

36 David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget? The US Army and Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Cork: University of Ireland, 2010) 149.

37 Raphael E. Moyer, *Death Before Dismount?: Mechanization, Force Employment and Counterinsurgency Outcomes in Iraq* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010) 6.

38 Mike Capstick, 'The Civil-Military Effort in Afghanistan: A Strategic Perspective', in: *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 10:1 (2007) 1-19.

39 Chris C. Demchak, 'Wars of Disruption: International Competition and Information Technology-Driven Military Organizations', in: *Contemporary Security Policy*, 24:1 (2003) 76.

40 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1988).

41 Steven Metz and James Kievit, *Strategy and the Revolution in Military Affairs: From Theory to Policy* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 1995) p. v.

42 William A. Owens, 'The Emerging System of Systems', in: *Strategic Forum* 63 (1996) 35-39; Col. Bruce Smith, 'Adapting and Understanding the Future of War', in: *Army Space Journal* 9:1 (2010) 12.

43 Ibid.

44 Milton Finger, 'Technologies to Support Peace Keeping Operations', in: *Improving the Prospects for Future International Peace Operations: Workshop Proceedings* (Washington D.C., U.S. Congress Office of Technology, 1995) 105-114.

45 Cameron, 'Two Front War', 132; David R. Mets, *The Air Campaign: John Warden and the Classical Airpower Theorists* (Maxwell: Air University Press, 1999).



PHOTO STARS AND STRIPES

Television reports covering the Vietnam War created a lack of credibility for the American government and negatively influenced the support of the population

resources, as airpower demonstrated, when compared between Vietnam and Desert Storm.<sup>46</sup> The increasing accuracy in striking targets by heavy firepower dominated tactically. This way of war also caused a reliance on air and firepower as the primary means of using military force. These advantages worked suitably in conventional conflicts, but did not work satisfactorily in peace support operations during the last decade of the twentieth century. Relying too heavily on airpower could be exploited by opponents, as Slobodan Milosevic showed during NATO's air campaigns over the Balkans when he dispersed military units among convoys of refugees.<sup>47</sup>

Modern technology gave political decision makers an option to conduct 'clean' and 'distant' warfare and changed how Western militaries operated and organized themselves. Technology therefore contributed significantly to military change. However, it often ignored the technical limitations in the reality of warfare.<sup>48</sup> Resulted in advanced and sophistica-

ted Western militaries being able to dominate at the tactical level. Western militaries however did not see the necessity to adapt their doctrine to be successful at the operational and strategic level. This strongly affected the ability to end conflicts decisively, especially during counterinsurgency and crisis operations.

## Society

The third and final main factor of military change is society. Over the course of the twentieth century, the place of society in war has changed dramatically. Western societies played a central role during the large-scale

46 Brig. Gen. David A. Deptula, *Effects-Based Operations: Change in the Nature of Warfare* (Arlington: Aerospace Education Foundation, 2001) 2; Stephen Budiansky, *Air Power: The Men, Machines, and Ideas that Revolutionized War. From Kitty Hawk to Gulf War II* (New York: Viking, 2004) 408-409.

47 Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001) 101-143.

48 Reuben E. Brigety II, *Ethics, Technology and the American Way of War* (London: Routledge, 2007) 1-3.

industrial wars of the first half of the century. Conflicts in Western Europe were largely fought by conscript armies, which meant a larger part of the general public coming into contact with military operations than during the latter part of the century, when operations were conducted farther from home and with a smaller force. The public's influence on decision making in that first period was rather limited though. As the century progressed, military operations became more distant and expeditionary and the public feeling with and understanding of conflict declined. However, its influence on decision making had been increasing ever since the end of the Second World War. Several elements of society have become increasingly important for military change and the outcome of conflicts in which Western states have participated.

The first and most important element of society which had a significant influence on military operations were the media. The media have always formed the connecting link between the battlefield and society. During the first half of the century, governments had greater influence on what they wanted the public to see, read or hear.<sup>49</sup> The means to distribute news reports were also limited and therefore easy for the

state to censor.<sup>50</sup> Due to the character of the conflict and its public support, this censorship went largely unchallenged and presented a mainly non-graphic picture of the conflict.<sup>51</sup> As the character of warfare changed, the power of Western states to censor the media declined. On the one hand conflicts became more unconventional over the years, while on the other hand more technological means came available to distribute more detailed media reports to a wider public. By the end of the 1960's, graphic television coverage portrayed the war in Vietnam as a different reality than the U.S. government claimed it was.<sup>52</sup> Television reports covering the war created a lack of credibility for the government and negatively influenced the support of the American population.<sup>53</sup>

The influence of media coverage on conflicts increased even further during the last decades of the twentieth century. The 'CNN Effect', providing real-time coverage of operations in Iraq, had its origins in the early nineties.<sup>54</sup> Reaching an increasing part of the Western public, news coverage began to have more influence on foreign policy. Reports on certain conflicts caused the public to demand action from political decision makers, even though the state's interests of the countries involved were slim at best.<sup>55</sup> This caused leaders to make decisions regarding military operations based on media coverage influencing the public, rather than the hard facts of the conflict.<sup>56</sup> It is therefore obvious why strategic goals became less clearly definable. A good example is the start of Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia in 1995. The public outrage, caused by media reports, of the mortar bombing of the Sarajevo market caused the start of the operation.<sup>57</sup> The internet and social media made coverage of military operations become even more widespread. The public perception of the cost of war increased as the consequences of war became more visible, increasing the influence on public opinion and decision making. Despite Western militaries recognizing this increasing influence, its effects, consequences and impact were underestimated for too long.<sup>58</sup>

49 G.H. Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 82-83.

50 Michael Griffing, 'Media Images of War', in: *Media, War and Conflict*, 3:1 (2010) 12.

51 Kevin Foster, 'Deploying the Dead: Combat Photography, Death and the Second World War in the USA and Soviet Union', in: *War, Literature and the Arts Journal*, Volume 26 (2014) 6-7.

52 Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986) 129.

53 Griffing, 'Media Images of War', 15.

54 Phillip Seib, 'Effects of Real-Time News Coverage on Foreign Policy', in: *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 20:2 (2000) 1-2; Daya Kishan Thussu, 'Live TV and Bloodless Death: War Infotainment and 24/7 News', in: Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman (eds.), *War and the media: reporting conflict 24/7*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2003) 124.

55 Warren P. Strobel, 'The CNN-Effect', in: *The American Journalism Review*, 18:4 (May 1996).

56 Ilana Bet-El, 'Media and Conflict: An Integral Part of the Modern Battlefield', in: Kobi Michael, David Kellen and Eyal Ben-Ari, *The Transformation of the World of War and Peace Support Operations* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2009) 78.

57 Piers Robinson, 'Misperception in Foreign Policy Making: Operation Deliberate Force and the Ending of War in Bosnia', in: *Civil Wars*, 4:4 (2001) 120.

58 Maj. Ronald D. Hahn, *Media Influence and its Effects on Military Operations* (Quantico: U.S. Marine Corps University Press, 1998) 33.

The increase in media influence also had an impact on the ethical and legal norms of society regarding warfare. During the conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century, there was hardly any objection to the deliberate targeting of the civilian population and infrastructure as these were both seen as legitimate targets.<sup>59</sup> A well known example is the Allied strategic bomber offensive in World War Two.<sup>60</sup> The public accepted the high costs associated with conventional war because of the strategic objectives behind it and the stakes involved. This changed during the unconventional conflicts of the second half of the century, when it was no longer permissible to cause indiscriminate damage or sustain casualties at the same scale as before. The combination of shifted ethical norms and more detailed media coverage caused public outrage when the costs of conflict became too high or too visible. Furthermore, operations came under increased scrutiny of International Humanitarian Law,<sup>61</sup> meaning more restrictions on how to conduct military operations, even if an opponent did not adhere to the law.

The combination of more detailed reporting and changing norms resulted in a sensitivity towards casualties that had been increasing since World War Two. Ultimately a point was reached where it started to influence political and military leaders in making their decisions about using military force.<sup>62</sup> This did not just apply to friendly losses, but also to the amount of harm that could be caused on neutral parties or enemy combatants.<sup>63</sup> The public was no longer willing to accept military losses if the stakes were not high enough to justify them; neither was collateral damage accepted because technology enabled Western forces to strike targets with pin-point accuracy.<sup>64</sup> The origins of this sensitivity can also be found in the technological advances of the twentieth century. These advances changed the way Western states fought war, but it also changed the way the public thought about war. It even raised questions about morality.<sup>65</sup> The overwhelming technological superiority of Western militaries allowed them to avoid friendly casualties while deploying sophisticated and precise weaponry

against their opponents.<sup>66</sup> This way of warfare created an expectation with the public that conflict would be clean and quick, which was unrealistic during counterinsurgency or crisis operations.

Societal factors greatly influenced military change. Shifting ethical and legal norms combined with more extensive media coverage resulted in military operations being conducted for other reasons than national interests. At the same time, operations were more closely followed and judged by the general public. Decisions were made based on news reports and casualties dominated the outcome of operations. Society therefore had a significant influence on the goals and strategies of Western militaries.

## Conclusion

Western militaries' ability to end conflicts decisively in the second half of the twentieth century changed profoundly compared to the conflicts of the first half. It can also be concluded that military change had a great influence on this reduction in ability to win. This essay demonstrates that strategic, technological and societal factors all had significant influence on the goals, strategies and structures of Western

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- 59 Neta C. Crawford, 'Targeting Civilians and U.S. Strategic Bombing Norms', in: Matthew Evangelista and Henry Shue (eds.), *The American Way of Bombing: Changing Ethical and Legal Norms. From Flying Fortresses to Drones* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014) 64-86.
- 60 W. Hays Park, 'Precision' and 'Area' Bombing: Who Did Which, and When?' in: *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 18:1 (2008) 145-174.
- 61 Charles Garraway, 'The Law Applies, But Which Law?', in Matthew Evangelista and Henry Shue (eds.), *The American Way of Bombing*, 97-99.
- 62 Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004) 103; Philip Everts, 'War without Bloodshed? Public Opinion and the Conflict over Kosovo', in: Philip Everts and Pierangelo Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
- 63 Christopher Bellamy, *Knights in White Armour: The New Art of War and Peace* (London: Random House, 1996) 30.
- 64 Martin Shaw, 'Risk-Transfer Militarism, Small Massacres and the Historic Legitimacy of War', in: *International Relations*, 16:3 (2002) 352-356.
- 65 Laura Guillaume, 'Risk and War in the Twenty-First Century', in: *Intelligence and National Security*, 23:3 (2008) 410.
- 66 Patrick M. Shaw, *Collateral Damage and the United States Air Force* (Maxwell: Air University Press, 1997) 92.



*British Bulldog Armoured Vehicles on the outskirts of Basra, Iraq; changes led Western militaries to a point where they were no longer prepared for the conflicts they had to fight*

militaries. Strategic factors could be found in the changing character of war and the subsequent political interference that increased as conflicts became more unconventional. Strategic factors had their greatest influence on the goals and strategies of military organizations. As the unconventional conflict moved towards the centre of warfare, strategic goals and objectives became less clearly definable. Because of these more complicated goals, the electoral risks of military operations also increased, causing a greater political interference in military operations. This went as far as strategic leadership managing tactical decisions, thereby influencing the conduct and outcome of operations.

Technological factors had their greatest influence on structures and strategies of military organizations. Sophisticated military technology led to the reduction in size of most Western militaries. Furthermore, Western nations deployed considerably more advanced technological innovations than before. Western militaries were mostly stuck in a doctrinal/technological bias during the second half of the twentieth century. They therefore deployed them in unconventional operations, thereby dominating their opponents tactically. However, it was not the solution to end conflicts decisively at the operational and strategic level. Society is the final factor that caused change, in

goals and strategies in particular. More detailed media coverage reached a greater part of society as the twentieth century progressed, resulting in political decisions about military operations based on the amount of media coverage available. Increased media coverage also changed ethical and legal norms regarding military operations which ultimately led to a sensitivity towards casualties. This sensitivity influenced the conduct and even the outcome of military operations during the last decades of the twentieth century.

All in all, it can be concluded that Western militaries have spent the second half of the twentieth century conducting mostly unsuccessful operations. Their decision makers were distracted by electoral risks and media publicity, and no longer based the use of force on the promotion of national interests. Strategic conditions, in combination with technological developments and a cultural transformation of society, have had a significant influence on the goals, strategies and organizations of Western militaries. These changes led Western militaries to a point where they were no longer prepared for the conflicts they had to fight. They trained for the conflicts they wanted to fight according to their technological/doctrinal bias, but in fact fought the conflicts they were allowed to fight by society. This combination ultimately reduced the ability to end conflicts decisively. ■