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# Makers of Modern Strategy

*from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*

PETER PARET



PRINCETON

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from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age

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# Makers of Modern Strategy

from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age

*edited by* PETER PARET

*with the collaboration of*

GORDON A. CRAIG *and* FELIX GILBERT

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# Makers of Modern Strategy

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## Introduction

PETER PARET

CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ defined strategy as the use of combat, or the threat of combat, for the purpose of the war in which it takes place. This formulation, which a modern historian has characterized as both revolutionary and defiantly simplistic, can be amended or expanded without difficulty.<sup>1</sup> Clausewitz himself, setting no great store in absolute definitions, varied the meaning of strategy according to the matter at hand. Strategy is the use of armed force to achieve the military objectives and, by extension, the political purpose of the war. To those engaged in the direction and conduct of war, strategy has often appeared more simply, in Moltke's phrase, as a system of expedients. But strategy is also based on, and may include, the development, intellectual mastery, and utilization of all of the state's resources for the purpose of implementing its policy in war. It is in both of these senses—the narrower, operational meaning, and its broadly inclusive implications—that the term is used in this volume.

Strategic thought is inevitably highly pragmatic. It is dependent on the realities of geography, society, economics, and politics, as well as on other, often fleeting factors that give rise to the issues and conflicts war is meant to resolve. The historian of strategy cannot ignore these forces. He must analyze the varied context of strategy, and the manner in which context and ideas act on each other, while he traces the development from idea to doctrine to implementation, a progression that in turn will give rise to further ideas. The history of strategic thought is a history not of pure but of applied reason. Consequently the essays in this volume go far beyond theory and touch on many of the military and nonmilitary factors that help shape war. In a variety of ways they demonstrate the close interaction of peace with war, the links between society and its military institutions and policies; but the thread of strategic thought runs through them all. The essays explore ideas of soldiers and civilians since

<sup>1</sup> Michael Howard, "The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1979); reprinted in Michael Howard, *The Causes of War*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 101.

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## INTRODUCTION

the Renaissance on the most effective application of their society's military resources: how can the fighting power available, or potentially available, be used to best purpose? Having addressed these ideas, the essays turn to the further issue: what impact did strategic theory have on wars and on the periods of peace that followed?

### I

The concept of this volume, and some of its substance, derive from an earlier work. In 1941 Edward Mead Earle organized a seminar on American foreign policy and security issues for faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study and Princeton University. The seminar led to a collection of twenty-one essays on "military thought from Machiavelli to Hitler," which Earle, assisted by Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, brought out two years later under the title *Makers of Modern Strategy*. One of the striking features of this book was the confidence of its editors and authors that in the midst of a world war the *history* of strategic thought deserved serious and wide attention. In their eyes, the trials of the present did not diminish the significance of the past. On the contrary, history now seemed particularly relevant. In his introduction, Earle declared that it was the purpose of the book "to explain the manner in which the strategy of modern war developed, in the conviction that a knowledge of the best military thought will enable . . . readers to comprehend the causes of war and the fundamental principles which govern the conduct of war." He added, "we believe that eternal vigilance in such matters is the price of liberty. We believe, too, that if we are to have a durable peace we must have a clear understanding of the role which armed force plays in international society. And we have not always had this understanding."<sup>2</sup>

The impact on these words of the condition in which they were written is apparent. A society that until recently had paid little attention to events beyond its borders was now fighting in the greatest war of all time. A new interest in learning about war, about matters that had been ignored but that now dominated public life, even an interest in gaining some kind of historical perspective not only on the political and ideological but also on the military elements of the conflict, might be expected. And as much a part of the atmosphere in which the essays were written was the belief not alone in the need but also in the possibility of a citizenry that understood the determining realities of war. *Makers of Modern Strategy* was a scholarly contribution from the arsenal of democracy in

<sup>2</sup> Edward Mead Earle, "Introduction," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton, 1943), viii.

the best sense of that contemporary term; a serious and fundamentally optimistic response to important intellectual needs of America at war and at the threshold of world power.

It was a further remarkable aspect of the book that its wartime origin and mission did not compromise its scholarly objectivity. Its contents varied in quality, although the general level was very high, but none of the essays was marred by chauvinism or denigrated current enemies; even essays on “Japanese Naval Strategy” and “The Nazi Concept of War” maintained an exemplarily intellectual honesty. No doubt that is one reason for the collection’s continued success, decades after the war ended. The book has now provided two generations of readers with a rich fund of knowledge and insight; for some, very likely, it has been their only encounter with the sophisticated study of war, as opposed to its drum-and-bugle variety.

*Makers of Modern Strategy* became a modern classic. That the essays dealing with the Second World War were soon overtaken by events did not weaken its overall impact. No book of this kind can remain up to date; more important was the fact that it defined and interpreted crucial episodes in earlier phases of strategic thought, showed their connection with general history, which even many historians tend to ignore, and placed some continuing issues of war and peace in broad historical perspective. But, inevitably, over time the volume as a whole became less satisfactory. Since the defeat of Germany and Japan and the advent of the nuclear age strategic analysis has moved in new directions, while historical research has continued to change and deepen our understanding of the more remote past. A replacement for *Makers of Modern Strategy* has now become desirable.

In preparing the new volume, the editors have had no wish to discard the model of the old. Neither comprehensiveness nor interpretive uniformity is aimed for. Contributors were not asked to employ a particular theoretical scheme; each approaches the subject from his or her point of view. As in the earlier work, too, significant figures and episodes in the history of strategy have had to be excluded if the volume, already large, was to be kept to reasonable size. Nevertheless, collectively the essays—linked chronologically and often thematically—offer the reader a guide to strategic theory and to ideas on the use of organized violence from the time Machiavelli wrote his *Arte della guerra* to the present.

The new *Makers of Modern Strategy* contains eight more essays than did its predecessor. A few essays have been taken over from the earlier work; most were not.<sup>3</sup> Three essays of the 1943 edition remain unchanged

<sup>3</sup> Of the essays that were not retained, several did not fit into the new distribution of

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## INTRODUCTION

except for some corrections and stylistic alterations: Henry Guerlac on Vauban and the impact of science on war in the seventeenth century, Robert R. Palmer on Frederick the Great and the change from dynastic to national war, and Edward Mead Earle on the economic foundations of military power. More might certainly be said about these figures and issues, but each essay retains a strong voice in the continuing scholarly discourse. The bibliographical notes of these essays have been updated. Two further essays have been very extensively rewritten, and two others revised.<sup>4</sup> The remaining twenty-two essays in the present volume are new.

To conclude this brief comparison of the two books, it may be appropriate to note some of the more significant thematic differences between them. The new volume has far more to say about American strategy than did its predecessor. It also contains four essays on the period since 1945, which still lay in the future for Earle and his collaborators. More generally, the new *Makers of Modern Strategy* takes a somewhat broader view of its subject. Earle would have preferred to limit himself and his collaborators to the analysis of major theorists, although the nature of the subject compelled him to look further. Because the United States had “not produced a Clausewitz or a Vauban,” the only American soldiers discussed in the earlier volume were Mahan and Mitchell. Other American and European figures were not included “either because they were more tacticians than strategists or because they bequeathed to posterity no coherent statement of strategical doctrine.” This last consideration also explains the absence of an essay on Napoleon. In his introduction, Earle wrote that Napoleon “recorded his strategy on the battlefield (if we exclude his trite maxims); hence he is represented here by his interpreters Clausewitz and Jomini.”<sup>5</sup> This seems too exclusive a point of view. The difference between strategy and tactics is worth preserving; but strategy is not exclusively—or even mainly—the work of great minds, interested in spelling out their theories. Although Napoleon did not write a comprehensive treatise on his ideas on war and strategy, they deserve to be studied, and not only through the intervening screen of Clausewitz’s and Jomini’s interpretations. An essay on Napoleon will

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topics—e.g., Derwent Whittlesey’s study of geopolitics and Theodore Ropp’s sketch of Continental doctrines of sea power. Others were written before adequate documentation on their subject was available or, although advancing scholarship at the time, have now been superseded. One or two—e.g., the essay on Maginot and Liddell Hart by the author who used the pseudonym Irving M. Gibson—did not achieve the quality of the rest.

<sup>4</sup> Felix Gilbert has rewritten his essay on Machiavelli, as has Mark von Hagen the essay on Marx and Engels by Sigmund Neumann. Gordon Craig has made some changes in his essay on Delbrück, and Peter Paret has revised the first part of Hajo Holborn’s essay on Moltke, the second part of which has been replaced by a new essay.

<sup>5</sup> Earle, “Introduction,” ix.

therefore be found in the present volume. But it must also be recognized that Napoleonic strategy was not created by the emperor alone. It was made possible because he had the genius and the compulsion to combine and exploit the ideas and policies of others. Some of these men, and even such forces as conscription, which cannot be identified with any particular individual, also belong to the history of strategy and are discussed here. As a contributor has commented, because of its broader historical focus, the new volume might be more appropriately titled *The Making of Modern Strategy*.

## II

The problems and conflicts of the times in which the new *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* appears are very different from those that gave rise to the earlier work. The need to understand war is, if possible, even greater now than it was in 1943. But the enormity of the issues has inhibited as much as it has encouraged their study. Many people have reacted to the destructive power of nuclear weapons by rejecting the concept of war in general, and consequently feel that the nature of war itself no longer requires investigation. It is even claimed that nuclear weapons have made all wars irrational and impossible, a denial of reality that is a measure of the special anxiety that has become a part of contemporary life. Until today the nuclear age has accommodated every conceivable kind of war waged with non-nuclear weapons, from terror and guerrilla operations to large-scale air strikes and armored campaigns. War has not been excluded, it has merely become more dangerous. And even in the realm of the unthinkable—as theories of nuclear deterrence show—strategy and the need to study it have not disappeared.

A continuum—intermittent and dialectical though it may be—runs from the strategies before 1945 to the strategies of conventional war since then. The link is less apparent, more ambiguous, between the prenuclear age and nuclear strategy. It has been argued that at least so far as nuclear conflict is concerned, everything on this side of the nuclear divide is new. The technology is certainly new; but man and his social and political ideas and structures have changed very little. Governments and armed services that dispose over nuclear arsenals are made up of men and women who are not yet so very different from their parents and grandparents.

Under these conditions of crisis and partial discontinuity, in which so many of our earlier experiences seem to be beside the point, the new *Makers of Modern Strategy* raises the question of relevance even more forcefully than did its predecessor. Edward Mead Earle had no doubt that an understanding of war in history would help the reader deal more

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## INTRODUCTION

intelligently with war in the present. Not everyone—certainly not every historian—would fully share his faith in the contemporary relevance of history. Not only is every age unique in its combination of conditions, issues, and personalities; occasionally a profound revolution in technologies, beliefs, or in social and political organization seems to sever us from history, and in the view of some reduces its relevance to an absurd fiction. Much depends, however, on what is meant by relevance. The past—even if we could be confident of interpreting it with high accuracy—rarely offers direct lessons. To claim that kind of relevance is to deceive oneself. But history as the educated memory of what has gone before is a resource not to be abandoned lightly. In the affairs of a nation and in the relations between states, as in the life of the individual, the present always has a past dimension, which it is better to acknowledge than to ignore or deny. And even if we can see the present only in its own surface terms, we still have available to us what may be the greatest value history has to offer: its ability, by clarifying and making some sense of the past, to help us think about the present and future.

The phenomenon of war can be better understood by studying its past. That is one message of this book. But the history of war should also be studied in order to understand the past itself. Historians have sometimes been reluctant to acknowledge this necessity. Although they can hardly deny that war has been a fundamental reality of social and political existence from the earliest stage of political organization to our own day, war is so tragic and intellectually and emotionally so disturbing that they have tended to sidestep it in their research. In the training of historians and the teaching of history, particularly in the United States, war has never been a favorite subject. One result has been to leave far too much scope for a popular, essentially romantic literature on war, which explains nothing, but crudely responds to the fascination that war past and present exerts on our imagination and on our wish to understand. This volume tries to suggest the usefulness of integrating the history of military thought and policy with general history.

The essays that follow have as their common subject the role of force in the relations between states. All recognize that war never has been, and is not today, a unitary or even a wholly military phenomenon, but a compound of many elements, ranging from politics to technology to human emotions under extreme stress. Strategy is merely one of these elements—if a large one at times. Twenty-four of the essays trace the ideas and actions of former generations, as they used and misused war; the remaining four analyze military thought and policy in the very recent past and the present. The book is largely historical; but it also addresses and—as was its predecessor—is dedicated to the timeless cause of “a broader understanding of war and peace.”

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PART ONE

## The Origins of Modern War



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# I. Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War

FELIX GILBERT

IF THE VARIOUS campaigns and uprisings which have taken place in Italy have given the appearance that military ability has become extinct, the true reason is that the old methods of warfare were not good and no one has been able to find new ones. A man newly risen to power cannot acquire greater reputation than by discovering new rules and methods." With these words from the famous last chapter of *The Prince*—"The exhortation to free Italy from the barbarians"—Machiavelli expressed an idea that recurs frequently in his writings: new military institutions and new processes in warfare are the most urgent and the most fundamental requirement of his time. Machiavelli is usually held to have introduced a new era, the modern era, in the development of political thought; his conviction that the military organization of contemporary Italian states needed changing was a driving force, a central concern behind all his reflections on the world of politics. It hardly goes too far to say that Machiavelli became a political thinker because he was a military thinker. His view of the military problems of his time patterned his entire political outlook.

## I

Machiavelli occupies a unique position in the field of military thought because his ideas are based on a recognition of the link between the changes that occurred in military organization and the revolutionary developments that took place in the social and political sphere. To the ordinary observer, the connection between cause and effect in military developments seemed obvious. The discovery of gunpowder and the invention of firearms and artillery suggested that the armor of the knight was doomed and the collapse of the military organization of the Middle Ages, in which knights played the decisive role, had become inevitable. In his epic *Orlando Furioso* (1516), Ariosto, Machiavelli's contemporary and Italian compatriot, narrates how Orlando, his hero and the embodiment of all knightly virtues, was forced to face an enemy with a firearm:

At once the lightning flashes, shakes the ground,  
The trembling bulwarks echo to the sound.  
The pest, that never spends in vain its force,  
But shatters all that dares oppose its course,  
Whizzing impetus flies along the wind.

When the invincible Orlando succeeded in overcoming this redoubtable enemy and could choose from the rich booty:

. . . nothing would the champion bear away  
From all the spoils of that victorious day  
Save that device, whose unresisted force  
Resembled thunder in its rapid course.

Then he sailed out on the ocean, plunging the weapon into the sea and exclaiming:

O! curs'd device! base implement of death!  
Fram'd in the black Tartarean realms beneath!  
By Beelzebub's malicious art design'd  
To ruin all the race of human kind. . . .  
That ne'er again a knight by thee may dare,  
Or dastard cowards, by thy help in war,  
With vantage base, assault a nobler foe,  
Here lie for ever in th' abyss below!<sup>1</sup>

In short, if firearms had not been invented or could now be banished, the world of the knights would live on forever in all its splendor.

This dramatic explanation of the decline of the power of the knights hardly corresponds with reality. The history of military institutions cannot be separated from the general history of a period. The military organization of the Middle Ages formed an integral part of the medieval world, and declined when the medieval social structure disintegrated. Spiritually as well as economically the knight was a characteristic product of the Middle Ages. In a society in which God was envisaged as the head of a hierarchy, all secular activity had been given a religious meaning. The particular task of chivalry was to protect and defend the people of the country; in waging war the knight served God. He placed his military services at the disposal of his overlord, to whom the supervision of secular activities was entrusted by the church. Apart from its spiritual-religious side, however, the military bond between vassal and overlord also had its legal and economic aspects. The knight's land, the fief, was given to

<sup>1</sup> Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. John Hoole (London, 1783; Philadelphia, 1816), bk. 1, canto 9.

him by the overlord, and in accepting it, the knight assumed the obligation of military service to the overlord in wartime. It was an exchange of goods against services as was fitting to the agricultural structure and manorial system of the Middle Ages.

A religious concept of war as an act of rendering justice, the restriction of military service to the class of landholding knights and their retainers, and a moral-legal code which operated as the main bond holding the army together—these are the factors that determined the forms of military organization as well as the methods of war in the Middle Ages. The medieval army could be assembled only when a definite issue had arisen; it was ordered out for the purposes of a definite campaign and could be kept together only as long as this campaign lasted. The purely temporary character of military service as well as the equality of standing of the noble fighters made strict discipline difficult if not impossible. A battle frequently developed into fights between individual knights, and the outcome of such single combats between the leaders was decisive. Because warfare represented the fulfillment of a religious and moral duty, there was a strong inclination to conduct war and battles according to fixed rules and a settled code.

This military organization was a typical product of the whole social system of the Middle Ages, and any change in the foundations of the system had inevitable repercussions in the military field. When rapid expansion of a money economy shook the agricultural basis of medieval society the effects of this development on military institutions were immediate. In the military field those who were the protagonists of the new economic developments—the cities and the wealthy overlords—could make great use of the new opportunities: namely, to accept money payments instead of services, or to secure services by money rewards and salaries. The overlord could accept money payments from those who did not wish to fulfill their military obligations and, on the other hand, he could retain those knights who remained in his army beyond the period of war and for longer stretches of time by promises of regular payments. Thus he was able to lay the foundations of a permanent and professional army and to free himself from dependence on his vassals. This transformation of the feudal army into a professional army, of the feudal state into the bureaucratic and absolutist state, was a very slow process and reached its climax only in the eighteenth century, but the true knightly spirit of the feudal armies died early and quickly. We possess an illustration of this change in a fifteenth-century ballad, describing life in the army of Charles the Bold of Burgundy.<sup>2</sup> In the fifteenth century Burgundy

<sup>2</sup> Ballad by Emile Deschamps, "Quand viendra le trésorier?" in E. Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Saint Hilaire (Paris, 1884), 4:289.

was a very recent political formation and the older powers considered it as a kind of parvenu; therefore, Charles the Bold was particularly eager to legitimize the existence of his state by strict observance of old traditions and customs, and became in effect the leader of a kind of romantic revival of chivalry. It is the more revealing, therefore, that in this ballad, “knight, squire, sergeant and vassal” have only one thought, namely, “when will the paymaster come?” Here, behind the glittering façade of chivalry, is disclosed the prosaic reality of material interests.

In the armies of the greater powers, France, Aragon, or England, old and modern elements, feudal levy and professionalism, were mixed; but the great money powers of the period, the Italian cities, came to rely entirely on professional soldiers. Since the fourteenth century, Italy had been the “promised land” of all knights to whom war was chiefly a means of making money. The single groups, the *compagnie di ventura*, were supplied and paid by their leaders, the *condottieri*, who offered their services to every power willing to pay their price. Thus, in Italy soldiering became a profession of its own, entirely separated from any other civilian activity.

The impact of the money economy provided a broader opportunity for recruiting armies. New classes of men, free from the preceding military traditions, were attracted into the services by money, and with this infiltration of new men, new weapons and new forms of fighting could be introduced and developed. Archers and infantry made their appearance in the French and English armies during the Hundred Years’ War. This tendency toward experimentation in new military methods received a further strong impetus from the defeats that the armies of Charles the Bold suffered at the hands of the Swiss near the end of the fifteenth century. In the battles of Morat and Nancy (1476), the knights of Charles the Bold, unable to break up the squares of Swiss foot soldiers and to penetrate into the forest of their pikes, were thoroughly defeated. This event was a European sensation. Infantry had won its place in the military organization of the period.

The importance of the invention of gunpowder has to be evaluated against the background of these general developments: first, the rise of a money economy; second, the attempt of the feudal overlord to free himself from dependence on his vassals and to establish a reliable foundation of power; and third, the trend toward experimentation in military organization resulting from the weakening of feudal bonds.

Firearms and artillery were not the cause of these developments but they were an important contributory factor, accelerating the tempo of the evolution. First of all, they strengthened the position of the overlord in relation to his vassals. The employment of artillery in a campaign was

a cumbersome task; many wagons were needed for transportation of the heavy cannon and for their equipment, mechanics and engineers became necessary, and the whole procedure was extremely expensive. The accounts of military expenditures for this period show that the expenses for artillery constituted a disproportionately large part of the total.<sup>3</sup> Only the very wealthy rulers were able to afford artillery. Also, the principal military effect of the invention of artillery worked in favor of the great powers and against the smaller states and local centers of independence. In the Middle Ages, the final sanction of the position of the knight had been that, in his castle, he was relatively immune from attack. The art of fortification was much cultivated in this period.<sup>4</sup> Small states protected themselves by establishing at their frontiers a line of fortresses that enabled them to hold out even against superior forces. These medieval fortifications were vulnerable, however, to artillery fire. Thus, the military balance became heavily weighed in favor of the offensive. Francesco di Giorgio Martini, one of the great Italian architects of the fifteenth century, who was in charge of the building of the fortresses for the Duke of Urbino, complained in his treatise on military architecture that “the man who would be able to balance defense against attack, would be more a god than a human being.”<sup>5</sup>

These changes in the composition of armies and in military technique also transformed the spirit of military organization.<sup>6</sup> The moral code, traditions, and customs, which feudalism had evolved, had lost control over the human material from which the armies were now recruited. Adventurers and ruffians who wanted wealth and plunder, men who had nothing to lose and everything to gain through war, made up the main body of the armies. As a result of a situation in which war was no longer undertaken as a religious duty, the purpose of military service became financial gain. The moral problem arose whether it was a sin to follow a profession that aimed at the killing of other people. In the most civilized parts of Europe, such as Italy, people looked with contempt on soldiers and soldiering.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for instance “Ordine dell’Esercito Ducale Sforzesco, 1472-1474,” *Archivio storico Lombardo*, ser. I, vol. 3 (1876), 448-513.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages* (London, 1924), 1:358.

<sup>5</sup> Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Trattato di architettura civile e militare*, ed. Carlo Promis (Torino, 1841), 131.

<sup>6</sup> In general, see Piero Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare italiana* (Torino, 1952), and see also the chapters “Military Development and Fighting Potential” and “Soldiers and the State” in M. E. Mallett and J. R. Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State* (Cambridge, 1984), 65-100, 181-98.

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It can almost be thought of as the *Makers of Modern Strategy* for the al Qaeda world. Like innumerable books on modern jihadism, Ryan's book discusses the works of Sayyid Qutb and Ayman al-Zawahiri, but its core is an exegesis of the written works of four of the most prominent strategic thinkers in the al Qaeda world: Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, Abu Bakr al-Naji, and Abu Musab al-Suri. Interestingly, even though the struggle against al Qaeda continues unabated, by 2005 all of the writers highlighted in this book had gone silent—captured, killed, or vanished—and no comparably bi *Makers of Modern Strategy* from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age. Edited by Peter Paret With Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert. A Book-of-the-Month Club Dividend. " brilliant essays that together comprise a unique. The essays in this volume analyze war, its strategic characteristics and its political and social functions, over the past five centuries. The diversity of its themes and the broad perspectives applied to them make the book a work of general history as much as a history of the theory and practice of war from the Renaissance to the present. *Makers of Modern Strategy* from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age takes the first part of its title from an earlier collection of essays, published by Princeton University Press in 1943, which became a classic of historical scholarship. In modern times—with the rise of the national state, the expansion of European civilization throughout the world, the industrial revolution, and the steady advance of military technology—we have constantly been confronted with the interrelation of commercial, financial, and industrial strength on the one hand, and political and military strength on the other. In 1941, when the Princeton seminar in military affairs began the work that led to the original *Makers of Modern Strategy*, the subject of this essay did not exist. Of course modern history was littered with revolutions, and most of those revolutions had involved some kind of warfare.