

The Legacy of Liddell Hart: The Contrasting Responses of Michael Howard and André Beaufre

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ABSTRACT

This article establishes how the careers and strategic ideas of Sir Michael Howard and General André Beaufre have been influenced by their friendship with one of Britain's most significant intellectuals of the twentieth century, Sir Basil Liddell Hart. The article traces the relationships between Howard, Beaufre and Hart while outlining the evolution of the 'indirect approach' in the nuclear age. It was through the work of these two friends of Liddell Hart who evolved and developed his ideas for a new age and a new strategic-political context.

The subject of this essay is the strategic legacy of Sir Basil Liddell Hart, one of the preeminent military thinkers of the twentieth century, as interpreted by two of his closest friends, Sir Michael Howard and General André Beaufre.¹ Such a theme demonstrates how these ideas evolved and changed in the hands of others. This approach has the added advantage of relating Howard's work to the time that it was written and in relation to others, and moreover, shift the focus on Liddell Hart away from the interwar years and into the nuclear age. The essay's concerns are not with the technicalities of nuclear strategy but only with the fundamental concepts on which it rests. In addition, a study of these matters can only benefit from an Anglo-French thrust. Liddell Hart was born in France and it is desirable to broaden the context of the customary Anglo-American discussion of these issues. American strategic thinkers will be considered briefly towards the end, but more space will be devoted to Beaufre who went to great lengths to develop the strategic potential of

¹ This was the subject of my 2012 Annual Liddell Hart Lecture delivered on 27th November 2012 in honour of Sir Michael Howard's 90th Birthday at King's College London. The lecture as delivered was published by the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives as a pamphlet, *Michael Howard and Evolving Ideas About Strategy* (2013). What follows is a revised version, and I am grateful to the Trustees of the LHCMA for permission to quote from copyright material.

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Liddell Hart's favourite notion of an indirect approach to strategy. Today's burgeoning Anglo-French defence relationship might give this effort further interest.

The essay comprises four themes: Liddell Hart's legacy will be summarised. Howard and Beaufre's treatment of it will then be assessed, before proceeding to discuss how each refined, altered and adapted these ideas – or rejected them – rather than accept them as Liddell Hart preferred as the unvarnished 'truth'. Finally, I shall conclude with a few observations on the degree to which Bernard Brodie and Henry Kissinger – both friends of Howard – could be regarded as disciples of Liddell Hart.

To begin with Liddell Hart. During the 1960s Liddell Hart's reputation reached extraordinary heights. When he visited Israel in 1960 his trip stimulated more public interest than that of any other foreign visitor except Marilyn Monroe. The publication in 1967 of the Fourth Edition of *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* was treated as a major intellectual event in the armed forces of the West and beyond. He was indisputably the world's most distinguished and celebrated military thinker. In an earlier edition Liddell Hart expressed his faith that the indirect approach expressed 'a law of life in all spheres: a truth of philosophy'.² It provided a vehicle for the expression of Liddell Hart's Edwardian rationalism that exalted not just reason, but truth, order, progress, judicious compromise and careful understanding – all those things that contributed to 'civilized values'. He abhorred expediency, extremes of any kind, fanaticism and all forms of emotionalism and confrontation. These last were wont to push an opponent into a corner, making agreement well nigh impossible and thus a fight to the finish inevitable.

Close scrutiny of the conceptual base of the indirect approach has revealed vagueness and elasticity: it can stretch one way or the other depending on where one wants to pull it. Three points can be advanced by way of elucidation. First, it is a concept rooted in *history*. Liddell Hart did not claim novelty for his strategic theorem; 'it rather', he explains, 'seeks to crystallise strategic thought more clearly and re-define it afresh in the light of new and enlarged experience and knowledge of psychology'. Secondly, its deductions were based on 'the near ruinous lesson of 1914-18'; further extrapolations rested on the experience of 1939-45 which Liddell Hart regarded as no less disastrous.³ It was thirdly, a strategy of *limited aim*, that is a waiting game, one that seeks 'a change in the balance of force, a change often sought and achieved by draining the enemy's force, weakening him by pricks instead of risking blows'. It attempted to reduce resistance by exploiting movement and surprise. It is this last element – the operational method – that combines audacity

² Fourth Edition (London: Cassell, 1967), p. 18, 'Preface to the Revised Edition of 1954'. All quotations are from the fourth edition.

³ In 1944-45, he proclaimed, 'the pursuit of triumph was foredoomed to turn into tragedy, and futility' (Ibid., p. 15).

and mobility, dazzling manoeuvres, with thrusts into the enemy's rear echelons that Liddell Hart's name is normally associated; but it should be stressed that the strategic source from which this fast-flowing stream emanates is water of a much more sluggish gait. The post-war world would require the prime understanding that war is not all rush. The exercise of the indirect approach in the nuclear age would still require distraction, deception and, above all, the need to out-think the enemy, but it also required some balancing qualities as well.

The advent of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons rendered *prudence* a high virtue. These weapons, Liddell Hart affirmed, rendered any idea of 'victory' or 'total war' absurd. The nuclear age gave a new impetus to the cautious ripples of the indirect approach – and its undertow, Liddell Hart's profound belief that the perfection of strategy should be sought in the elimination of fighting. The basis of strategy, he stressed, was a duality: 'Like a coin it has two faces. Hence the need for a well calculated compromise as a means to reconciliation'.⁴

It is timely to delineate the seven key themes of the indirect approach. They are all expressions of a characteristic Liddell Hart paradox: 'In strategy, the longest way round is often the shortest way there'.⁵

- The dislocation of the enemy's psychological and physical balance should be the 'vital prelude' to his overthrow; not his utter destruction.
- Second, always negotiate an end to unprofitable wars. The method should remain the same as he advocated in the 1930s: 'a shrewd calculation of the military economic factor' based on hard-headed business-like methods. The danger of nuclear war gave these an added urgency.
- Third, the methods of the indirect approach were 'better suited to the psychology of a democracy'. Strategists should be 'attuned...to the popular ear'. Democracies, he warned, were less tolerant of the prodigious cost of modern war.
- Fourth, military power rests on economic endurance; a decision should be gained by 'sapping the opponent's strength and will'. He placed great weight therefore on the significance of blockades. The latter represent an effective indirect approach 'which incurred no risk except in its slowness of effect'.
- Fifth, and implicit in the foregoing, his concept rested on an assumption that war was an activity *between states*. Its fundamental object, Liddell Hart held, ensured the maintenance of state policy 'in face of the determination of the

⁴ B. H. Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), pp. 93, 94, 97, 99, 100, 106; for developments and recapitulations of this theme, see Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, pp. 334, 343, 359.

⁵ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, p. 25.

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opposing state to pursue its contrary policy'. He adds, 'For a state to gain its object in war it has to change this adverse will into compliance with its own policy'.

- Sixth, he urged the adoption of what he called in the 1930s, 'Rational pacifism'. This standpoint was expressed in a maxim of his own devising, that his post-war disciples took to heart, 'if you wish for peace, understand war'. But Liddell Hart remained adamantly opposed to unwise one-sided disarmament, as it would render the disarmer 'impotent either to check war or to control its cause'.
- Seventh, and finally, Liddell Hart's study of history revealed that victory often emerged as the result of self-defeating action by the enemy. In 1945 'Germany went far to defeat herself'. But he feared that the exhaustion of 1945 would 'incubate the germs of another war': the spectre of the World War III that preoccupied a generation.⁶

Liddell Hart thus arrived at a cogent short definition of strategy: 'the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy'.⁷

Liddell Hart added a codicil to this strategic last will and testament. It would figure prominently in the work of his disciples and is given pride of place in Liddell Hart's book, *Deterrent or Defence* (1960). The possession of a nuclear deterrent does not do away with an overall defence policy designed to resist a diverse range of threats. The deterrent effect of nuclear weapons was 'fading' except when applied to their own kind, for 'other forms of aggression may proceed', he writes, 'with impunity if they are limited in aim and action'. The West might find itself helpless to resist a quick and bloodless *fait accompli*. Liddell Hart's book was publically endorsed by John F. Kennedy in the Presidential Election of 1960 as validating his criticisms of the Eisenhower Administration's defence policy which, he claimed, relied too heavily on the nuclear deterrent to the detriment of conventional, land forces. But the book is a collection of previously published articles, and Michael Howard got into hot water with Liddell Hart when he reviewed it critically, pointing out the inadequacies of this kind of publication.⁸

In short, nuclear deterrence could provoke guerrilla war. Large powers could exploit the nuclear stalemate 'under camouflage' and sponsor such conflicts. They could only be combated by the pursuit of 'a counter strategy of a more subtle and far-seeing

⁶ Key themes: *Ibid.*, 1) pp. 115, 164, 219, 228; 2) pp. 104, 132; 3) pp. 150, 160, 163; 4) pp. 198, 203, blockade, 204, 218, 283, 357; 5) p. 227; 6) pp. 228, 229-30; 7) pp. 329, 362-63; also see Liddell Hart, *British Way in Warfare*, p. 8.

⁷ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, p. 335.

⁸ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Deterrent or Defence* (London Stevens, 1960), p. x; Michael Howard, review in *Survival*, 2 (September-October 1960), p. 214.

kind'. Here was another problem, the poor quality of Western leadership in the Cold War – a widely felt, though greatly exaggerated view that Kennedy exploited in his presidential campaign. In essence, Saki Dockrill has shown that the Kennedy Administration did not greatly increase the number of American land forces deployed by its predecessor. Liddell Hart interpreted this controversy in his own way, and sang the praises of 'prophets', that by implication included himself, a class of leaders, 'philosophical strategists' who gained acceptance by the packaging of their ideas 'as the revival in modern terms of a time-honoured principle or practice that had been forgotten'. This role appeared to elevate the importance of the historian in strategic formulation, or at least history, but also revealed a hostage to fortune, the self-serving abuse or even manipulation of the historical record.⁹

Michael Howard played an important role in exposing some of Liddell Hart's abuses of history but also in carrying forward some of the elements of the indirect approach in the nuclear age. Howard offers a memorable description of this stratagem in his own memoirs, which is far from dismissive, as resembling the work of the nineteenth century Swiss theorist, Baron Jomini. Fundamentally, Liddell Hart, like Jomini had only one idea and spent his entire life repeating, reformulating and inflating it.¹⁰ One other aspect of the reception of Liddell Hart's legacy should also be spelled out, which the late American historian, Jay Luvaas, another of his disciples, impressed on me two decades ago. Liddell Hart tended to assume, Luvaas claimed, that if one admired a particular aspect of his work, that one accepted 'the entire package'.¹¹ Unravelling this package represented a major challenge for Liddell Hart's disciples for he regarded the route by which he arrived at his conclusions and their universal applicability as evidence of fundamental 'truth'. He did not recognise that ideas must be modified over time, as changing historical circumstances modify their bearing and significance and their proportions and dimensions vary.

Howard's life had been shaped by his experience of the Second World War as Liddell Hart's had been by the First. He was born on 29 November 1922, educated at Wellington and Christ Church Oxford. Sir Keith Feiling and A.J.P. Taylor were among his tutors and Hugh Trevor-Roper, another Christ Church man, would also be a major influence on his career. After decorated wartime service in the Coldstream Guards and on the strength of his regiment's history (much of it written in the Library of the Reform Club) in 1947 he gained appointment as assistant lecturer in history at King's College London, promoted in 1950 to lecturer in history

⁹ Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New-Look National Security Policy, 1953-1961* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 278; Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, p. 19.

¹⁰ Michael Howard, *Captain Professor: The Memoirs of Sir Michael Howard* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 154.

¹¹ Conversation during the Second International Conference on Strategy, US Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, February 1990.

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(later war studies). His friendship with Liddell Hart dates from 1954 and resulted from a wholly unexpected approach by the great man which so many, including Bernard Brodie, received via letter, though the pretext in this case was 'the depth and thought and understanding' that Howard had exhibited in a review of a book in military history.¹²

The personal reasons that brought Howard into the world of contemporary defence and security problems are perhaps the subject for another place and occasion. He was by no means the first historian to be attracted by the momentous issues and problems of his own time. My late colleague, Professor Saki Dockrill, was increasingly attracted to them in the last phase of her, alas, too short career. In the previous generation to Howard's, Sir Herbert Butterfield, E. H. Carr and A.J.P. Taylor had all written about contemporary matters and all three were more controversial figures. Of course, Liddell Hart himself offered Howard an example of the indefatigably industrious public intellectual who combined the study of history with analysis of contemporary problems; he also offered examples of tendencies to avoid, notably arrogance and dogmatism and naked self-promotion verging on vainglory.

Howard was a 'stalwart liberal', to use the historian Ian Roy's description, in a conservative college though he worked effectively with conservative institutions not least the armed forces. He made an important contribution to the centre-left tradition in British strategic thought which has proved so influential, and includes figures like Spenser Wilkinson, Liddell Hart, John Strachey, and P.M.S. (later Lord) Blackett. He also fell into the subject almost accidentally. When attending a meeting of the Royal Institute for International Affairs at Chatham House, he was assigned by Alistair Buchan to a Study Group on 'Disengagement in Europe' and as a young university lecturer was appointed rapporteur. Buchan, too, would become a powerful influence on his career and interest in contemporary defence problems and strategy. Howard wrote up their findings as his first book, *Disengagement in Europe* (1958), published by Penguin, then expanding its list with a series of concise, lucid, and penetrating surveys of post-war problems written by young dons who had been officers in 1939-45 (Gordon Connell-Smith's *Pattern of the Post-War World* [1957] was advertised on its back cover). Disengagement was a favoured device in the mid-1950s designed to reduce the tensions of the Cold War by which Germany would be demilitarised in return for Soviet withdrawal in Eastern Europe.

Howard's strategic approach rested on an understanding that the central problem facing the twentieth century would continue to be the increasing spirals of destructive power inherent in modern war, taken to an apocalyptic and ruinous

¹² On the background and formative influences, see Brian Holden Reid, 'Michael Howard and the Evolution of Modern War Studies', *The Journal of Military History*, 73 No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 869-904.

plenitude by nuclear weapons. He also grasped the complexity of these issues not easily solved by (to some) self-evident and simple solutions. Howard's intellectual outlook was decisively shaped by the passage of the Cold War and he would later place efforts to resist Soviet power on a par with the struggles of previous generations of statesmen to resist French and German power. So he had no illusions about the nature of the adversary.

In *Disengagement in Europe*, a book provided with a concise historical context, he stressed the need for 'firm, flexible, and patient attitudes, for any solution to the strategic *impasse* in Europe should not be adopted if it damaged "deterrence" – then still placed in quotation marks – 'to discourage the Russian leaders from taking unwise risks'. In short new measures should not be adopted if they exacerbated 'fears and create new tensions' however laudable they may appear. Such efforts should be relinquished 'in the general interests of the peaceful survival of mankind'. In his conclusion, Howard made three points that he would develop over the next half century: 'The less secure the Russian leaders feel', he wrote, 'the less likely they are to make concessions: we are not the only people who like to negotiate from strength'. Secondly, increased tension between the armed blocs was not just a European problem, for it developed out of broader conflicts of ideology and 'the nature of the armaments themselves' and these 'can be allayed by general measures of disarmament mutual inspection and control'. There would be changes of emphasis here, but his central point was that tension was not caused *solely* by the weapons deployed, that 'armed races' in themselves do not cause tension, they are symptoms of it. This led to his final, third point. Peace did not consist of an absence of international difficulties but a tolerance of them; it was necessary 'to rely on time and good will to soften their sharp edges if not to solve them'. In other words, the settlement of Europe would neither be a magical nor 'an isolated act'.¹³

In developing his ideas Howard never consciously viewed himself as a 'strategist' as some of his pupils do. But strategy was vital in bridging his historical works with contemporary analysis, what he calls the 'strategic approach' which developed into a new academic discipline, strategic studies, and drew on international relations inspired by the work of scholars like Hedley Bull (with whom his own personal relations would become tense) and Martin Wight (whose erudition awed Howard). Conversely, this heuristic tool kit shaped by strategy, linked past, present and future in one body of knowledge – war studies. Howard's approach had been consistently historical in its exegesis. He with others, such as the lapsed historian, Sir Laurence Martin, as well as Alistair Buchan and Philip Windsor, pioneered the *academic* study of strategy. Academic writers in the US, especially Brodie and Henry Kissinger, would acquire immense influence, indeed, Kissinger served as Secretary of State in

¹³ Michael Howard, *Disengagement in Europe* (London: Penguin, 1958), pp. 24-25, 86, 90-91, 92.

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the Nixon and Ford Administrations, 1973-77. Howard was content with the Kantian formulation that politicians and civil servants even if they were left to run the country should at least 'listen to what academics had to say'. His role was much more modest than Kissinger's, as intellectual inspiration to Denis Healey while Secretary of State for Defence, 1964-70, but he was listened to.¹⁴ His important role in establishing the Institute (later International Institute) for Strategic Studies (ISS) to create 'a milieu' for informed discussion is in some respects more enduring in taking forward, as we shall see, the evolution of strategic ideas. From the 1950s onwards the study of strategy could never be regarded as a military monopoly.¹⁵

It almost goes without saying that Howard's study of strategy - like Liddell Hart's - was rooted in his understanding of the past. He had consistently argued that those who wrote about nuclear strategy and studied history 'talked more sense' than those who had not.¹⁶ He also remained loyal to Liddell Hart's definition of strategy, which he described in his important study, 'The Classical Strategists', originally published as part of *Problems of Modern Strategy* (ISS, Adelphi Paper No. 54, 1969) 'as good as any, and better than most'. Howard considered strategy a 'dialectic of two opposing wills'. Strategy must be related to the fundamental correlation of *power*. States should 'organize the relevant elements of the external world to satisfy their needs'. They were required to coerce their enemy and must be able 'to use violence for the protection, enforcement or extension of authority'. His liberal realism is best summed up in the remark that 'states are cold monsters who mate for convenience and self-protection, not love'. Howard was far more pragmatic than Liddell Hart. He underlined that the vital strategic element in the study of international relations - which had frequently been ignored before the nuclear age - was both descriptive and prescriptive; Liddell Hart tended to conflate the two elements. The 'descriptive function', Howard wrote, sought to analyse 'the extent to which the political units have the capacity to use or to threaten the use of armed force to impose their will on other units;' the prescriptive analytical function recommended policies that 'operate in an international system which is subject to such conditions and restraints'. There is evidence here, too, of an attempt to draw up a historically inspired conceptual framework for the study of strategy. It has shifted its focus many miles away from Liddell Hart's incorrigibly operational focus.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 161.

¹⁵ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA), Liddell Hart Papers I/384, Michael Howard to Liddell Hart, 16 October 1958. All subsequent references are to this source in the LHCMA, King's College London. I am grateful to the Trustees for permission to quote from copyright material.

¹⁶ Letter to the author, 3 July 2008.

¹⁷ Michael Howard, *Studies in War and Peace* (London: Temple Smith, 1970), pp. 154, 209, 235; idem, *The Causes of Wars* (London: Temple Smith, 1983), pp. 36, 61; *Liberation or Catastrophe? Reflections on the History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 129.

It is notable too that Howard attempted to reduce the issues of war and peace to their indisputable, fundamental elements rather than issue a list of maxims. He offered instead an attempt to improve *understanding* by clarifying the social context in which strategy operated; hence Howard's work paralleled that of Bernard Brodie. Unlike Brodie he did not produce a dedicated volume on the subject. In the Trevor-Roper tradition he wrote a series of concise, scintillating and beautifully written studies that eventually appeared in volumes of collected essays. These had an impact disproportionate to their length in a field cluttered by clichés, dreary jargon and latterly, of course, the dreaded, impenetrable 'management speak'.

In 'The Classical Strategists', Howard defined this school as those who acknowledge the existence of force in international relations, and believe 'that it can and must be intelligently controlled, but that it cannot be totally eliminated'. Although he may be acknowledging also his own creed here,¹⁸ Howard appeared to conclude that the day of the classical school had past. He argued that strategy in all its forms 'must take as its starting point an understanding of the political – including the social and economic – context out of which these conflicts arise or were likely to arise. Inevitably the interaction works both ways'. Strategic advocacy without this understanding cannot and should not dictate the statesman's course. Howard pointed to the importance of political scientists at one end of the spectrum 'and of physical scientists, systems analysts and mathematical economists at the other'; he thus called into question classical strategy 'as a self-sufficient study', as the maintenance of a stable, nuclear strategy increasingly drew on national resources across the board. A work such as Morton H. Halperin's *Contemporary Military Strategy* (1968) envisaged war in almost exclusively nuclear terms, and is very typical of thinking of the time in its utter rejection of traditional modes of thought; in this approach, he was hardly wrong, and Howard was influenced by the seemingly compelling logic that the ways of the future had no apparent connection with the past. A hint of the influence of nuclear strategy on Howard's thinking can be detected in one of his most significant edited works, the *festschrift* he organised for Liddell Hart's 70th birthday, *The Theory and Practice of War* (1965), which brought the thinking of his acolytes together in one place. Howard's essay on 'Jomini and the Classical Tradition in Military Thought' was gently critical of the key assumptions of the classical school, especially lists of the principles of war. These seemed in the nuclear age to have as much life and presence as the proverbial dodo; an appropriate if unoriginal simile. as the dodo was flightless, and all strategists were agreed that the weapons that really counted would be airborne.¹⁹

¹⁸ As pointed out by Lawrence Freedman, 'Strategic Studies and the Problem of Power', in L. Freedman, P. Hayes and R. O'Neill, eds., *War, Strategy and International Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 279.

¹⁹ Michael Howard, 'Jomini and the Classical Tradition in Military Thought', in idem (ed.), *The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to Captain B.H. Liddell Hart* (London: Cassell, 1965), p. 13; idem, www.bjmh.org.uk

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The most important point of departure from Liddell Hart's teaching would undoubtedly be Howard's restoration of respectability to the strategy of attrition long described by Liddell Hart as valueless if not self-destructive. A consistent theme of his historical works is that no amount of operational brilliance could overturn the resources of a superior coalition, especially if its members mobilized their resources with determination and vigour. Much of Howard's historical work in the 1970s was directed towards a thorough demolition of some of Liddell Hart's prized shibboleths, not least, the idea he advanced in the early 1930s of a 'British Way in Warfare', an amphibious strategy designed to seize overseas possessions in order to trade in negotiations for a compromise peace. Howard was critical both of Liddell Hart's historical method and the utility of such a strategy and made the case for the Continental Commitment that Liddell Hart abhorred. But more importantly, the political and social context of the strategic scene, as Howard understood it, was changing, too. So by the late 1970s such insights informed his writings on contemporary strategy. These form part of the prelude to another important revival in classical thinking. Whereas in 1969 Howard suggested that strategic manoeuvres were often in essence political manoeuvres, in two significant articles written after the end of the Vietnam War, 'The Relevance of Traditional Strategy' and 'The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy', both originally published in *Foreign Affairs*, Howard demonstrated over the next decade and more that the social and political context of strategy had changed. It gave renewed importance to the military dimension, to armed forces, that is, an area of activity still designated as 'conventional' strategy. The first argued that conventional forces might be employed 'so as to minimise the possibility of the adversary using his forces at all, and to maximize the credibility of the nuclear threat of their own government'. That is, they could shore up deterrence by rendering nuclear war unnecessary but make the threat of the use of these weapons more convincing. The second essay affirms that 'forgotten dimensions' - logistics and resources - forces lurking far from the battlefield - could negate operational skill; another significant departure, even within the classical framework, from Liddell Hart's teaching.²⁰

Did this approach commit the West to an inevitable nuclear sloggng match with the Soviet Union? In answering this question Howard expanded on two themes: responsibility and reassurance. Responsibility must be demonstrated in maintaining the existing, stable alliance structure and thus balance between NATO and the Warsaw Pact which permitted deterrence to continue. Reassurance required compromise, caution and mutual tolerance to keep the international temperature

Studies in War and Peace, p. 183; Morton H. Halperin, *Contemporary Military Strategy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 41-42, notes his scepticism over quantitative techniques as a driver of policy.

²⁰ Both reprinted in *Causes of Wars*, see pp. 98-99, 103-5 especially.

cool and not alarm western electorates unnecessarily or fan incipient anti-American feeling. Here are archetypal Liddell Hart themes, even expressed later as 'lessons'.²¹

The other important development of the indirect approach took place in the country of Liddell Hart's birth, France, by General André Beaufre (1902-75). Beaufre was educated at St Cyr, commissioned into the infantry and first met Liddell Hart in the spring of 1935. He joined Free France in 1942, and served as Deputy Chief of Staff Land Forces Western Europe, in Indo-China (where he helped extract Liddell Hart's son, Adrian, from his 'engagement' with the Foreign Legion), in Algeria, Suez, Germany and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) as Deputy Chief of Staff Logistics. He retired in 1961 after a stint on the NATO Standing Committee in Washington DC.²² Beaufre was a brilliant intellect, a man of demanding standards and sharp tongue who was something of 'a lone wolf among military men'. He agreed with Liddell Hart's views on the need to find 'intellectuellement sur 'l'ordre d'urgence'; as Howard appealed to Liddell Hart's frustrated academic side, Beaufre appealed to the military dimension of that complex character. Beaufre also had the self-confidence and high military rank not only to disagree with Liddell Hart but to not always follow the 'authorised version' of his past as the prophet of *blitzkrieg*. For instance, he did not hesitate to mention the defensive arguments Liddell Hart had made in 1939, rather than the later stress placed in the 1950s and 1960s on armoured mobility, an audacity of a different kind which on occasion took the master's breath away.²³

Nonetheless this remained a relationship of real warmth. Much merriment was caused in the Liddell Hart household when the latter introduced Beaufre to some friends and colleagues, who on hearing Beaufre's excellent English, 'were under the impression that you were my son – and remarked how well you spoke French, evidently comparing your fluency in the language with my stumbling efforts'. As Beaufre was only seven years younger than Liddell Hart this is more a tribute to his charm, eternal youthfulness and bilingual capacity than to any imagined family likeness. But he did regard Liddell Hart as 'mon parrain' - like a godparent - his godfather in military studies. Beaufre also shared some qualities with Howard, not least his authority, elegance of style and concision. Liddell Hart singled out for praise his lucidity, a quality which he praised in Howard's work, too. Howard and Beaufre

²¹ Michael Howard, 'The Lessons of the Cold War', *Survival*, 36 (1994-95), pp. 161-66.

²² B. H. Liddell Hart, *Memoirs*, (London: Cassell, 1965), I, p. 273; André Beaufre, 'Liddell Hart and the French Army, 1919-1939', in Howard (ed.), *Theory and Practice of War*, p. 140; Liddell Hart to Beaufre, 20 December 1951; also see Beaufre's c.v. 1/49/11/66

²³ *The Times*, 14 February 1973 obituary, copy in 1/49; Beaufre to Liddell Hart, 18 January 1951 1/40/83; see Liddell Hart's comment to Beaufre (29 June 1959) on the lack in NATO of 'very flexible minds and exceptionally strong characters' to engage in complex strategies. Liddell Hart to Desmond Flower, 18 September; Liddell Hart to Beaufre, 6 November 1967 1/49/83/208/212 Are these from the Liddell Hart papers?

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collaborated on the *festschrift* and also discussed Liddell Hart's *Memoirs* together on the BBC in November 1965.²⁴

Beaufre had begun work on *An Introduction to Strategy*, in which he developed the theory of an 'indirect strategy', while he was still serving. Although Beaufre wrote many books, it is his development of the indirect approach in this work that shall be the focus of attention here. 'I know that you will not agree completely', he admitted to Liddell Hart, 'but truth comes out of divergent views'. The development of Beaufre's ideas had been greatly aided by two important lectures he delivered in London. The first was to the Military Commentator's Circle on 15 June 1959 before a distinguished audience, 'Military Factors in the Defence of Europe'. He stressed the psychological factor in the 'state of flux' and 'rapid change' and 'the absolute break with past experience' that characterised the nuclear stalemate. Psychological bluff was 'woven into a subtle web of deterrents to impress the enemy and reassure our allies'. Underneath the over-arching nuclear deterrent, lurked what Beaufre called 'the critical point... a manoeuvre of indirect strategy that employed insidious means to attain limited goals'. This indirect strategy exploited deterrence while the 'political atmosphere is favourable'. He called for a new, subtle strategy of 'calculated ambiguities' – almost the perfect term to describe the indirect approach.²⁵

The second lecture Beaufre delivered at the ISS on 26 November 1964 in a bid to 'launch' the publication of the English translation to be published early the following year. He advocated strategy as a '*method of thought*' to discover the means most suitable to attain the political aim of the conflict. The aim – the 'key' (a favourite Liddell Hart metaphor) – of strategy should be '[f]reedom of action'. He agreed with Howard that disarmament presented dangers, not least 'the danger of conventional wars'; the 'golden rule' appeared to be 'that in our world *peace is imposed by a danger*'. In this dangerous world, indirect means might flourish.²⁶

The final version revealed a gifted theoretician. Beaufre described it himself as 'ce petit livre une surface plus grand'.²⁷ The French title of the book caused some discussion because it gave the impression of being a primer when it was nothing of the sort; but Beaufre insisted on its retention. The English version was translated by Major General R.H. Barry, a grandson of the architect, Sir Charles Barry, previously

²⁴ Beaufre to Liddell Hart, 8 December 1963, 4 November 1965; Liddell Hart to Beaufre, 20 July 1964, 8 November 1965 1/49/128/177/178/220.

²⁵ Beaufre to Liddell Hart, 16 October 1959; copy of the lecture, 'Military Factors in the Defence of Europe' 1/49/80/87, pp. 1-2. The audience included among many others, Rt. Hon. George Brown MP, R.T. Paget QC, MP, Rt. Hon. John Strachey MP and young Major A.H. Farrar-Hockley, a future NATO CinC.

²⁶ 'Contemporary Strategy', ISS Lecture, 26 November 1964, copy in 1/49/168.

²⁷ Beaufre to Liddell Hart, n.d. [? December 1962], 18 January 1963 1/49/112/115.

chief of staff and director of plans to the Executive Director (CD) of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), whose subsequent career in NATO had shadowed Beaufre's.²⁸

In seeking a workable philosophy, Beaufre rejected history as a prime explanatory tool, though he included a host of historical references in the text; instead he tried to expose and explain the basic ideas underlying strategy, what he termed its 'algebra'. He rejected Liddell Hart's definition as too concerned with military operations. He preferred to define strategy as 'the art of applying force so that it makes the most effective contribution towards the ends set by political activity'. Here Beaufre indicated agreement with and attempted to develop the post-war consensus (which would be periodically challenged) that strategy was above all an art. Liddell Hart, 40 years before and responding to a quite different set of intellectual currents, had viewed it as the product of *scientific* thinking. In Beaufre's opinion the main priority of strategy should be the creation and exploitation of circumstances '*resulting in sufficient moral disintegration of the enemy*' who will eventually accept the conditions 'it is desired to impose upon him'. He seemed dismissive of academic efforts as '[m]ountains of paper' but he considered that his own equally elaborate analysis would provide the 'essential ingredients of the overall strategy'. Beaufre's is indeed a military intellectual's book and includes principles, patterns and rules of strategy, though the whole is very stimulating and drawn up in accordance with the classical tradition. Yet he made a great point – unlike Liddell Hart – of avoiding the compulsion to justify any of the courses suggested therein.

Beaufre did make the case for his governing theorem, which he labelled 'total strategy', as this would embrace all the factors involved in a 'clash of wills'. He found room for manoeuvre in the Cold War restricted because of the dangers of escalation. Hence the importance he attached to the psychological weapon. In developing his ideas he at long last abandoned use of the word 'approach' and referred categorically to 'indirect strategy'. This he considered to be a 'must' for the weaker side. Beaufre held that the indirect strategy combining ideas, moral pressure and the 'geographical area where it is designed to obtain certain results', could produce 'a prolonged conflict so designed and organized that it becomes more and more burdensome to the enemy'. His experience in Indo-China and Algeria had a massive bearing on the way he envisaged the strategy developing. It was vital, he believed, that the West snatched back the initiative, as he warned that 'it is an exception for the defence to

²⁸ See M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France* Second Edition (London: HMSO, 1968), pp. 18-19; on Barry's linguistic skill, see idem, 'Barry, Richard Hugh (1908-99)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 volumes (Oxford University Press, 2004), IV, p. 149.

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be successful;’ Beaufre thus envisaged indirect strategy as an element of total strategy, not a cure-all, a strategy in a minor key.²⁹

The very clarity of Beaufre’s exposition ensured that areas of agreement were clearly sign-posted. Liddell Hart objected to the use of the term total strategy because he claimed it would be confused with ‘total war’. Beaufre would not be swayed, he disliked the term grand strategy, which Liddell Hart suggested as a substitute, and national strategy ‘du americains’ even more. Michael Howard hailed the book’s publication in France (along with Raymond Aron’s *Le Grand Debat*) as ‘an event of major importance in the history of strategic thought’. Yet he also thought the book occasionally *too* masterly. Beaufre stretched the definition of strategy almost to breaking point. He forced international relations to conform to strategy, Howard argued, and in dismissing the accidental or contingent he tended to fashion the West’s political leaders in an image demanded by the strategist. This did not happen often, as Howard wittily remarked of de Gaulle, ‘even when that political master is a General’. Developing this theme in ‘The Classical Strategists’, Howard pointed out that what Beaufre had really done was to draw up a theory of international relations as much as of strategy. But his theory neglected numerous political and social factors, for the world was not as polarised as he had claimed, and the sway of communist dictatorships was less unchallenged than he assumed. ‘Strategy’, Howard concluded, ‘must certainly be shaped by the needs of policy; but policy cannot be made to fit quite so easily into the Procrustean concepts of the professional strategist’.³⁰

By comparison with either Howard or Beaufre, neither Bernard Brodie nor Henry Kissinger fit within the Liddell Hart tradition. This is perhaps not surprising as after 1945, Liddell Hart, Howard and Beaufre contributed to an essentially European counterpoint to American strategic ideas. Yet Liddell Hart had many American admirers. Brodie proudly announced that he had been ‘a follower of yours’ since 1952 after the detonation of a thermonuclear weapon. They agreed on specific points: on the need to limit war but avoid major one-sided disarmament, and on the challenges presented by any effort to develop ‘appropriate’ skills among Western leaders; Brodie even took Liddell Hart’s side in his disputes with John Terraine over the conduct of the First World War. He admitted that he had been ‘outraged’ by Terraine’s arguments that reduced the overall British casualties at the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) in 1917. But Brodie was too independent-minded to accept Liddell Hart’s suggested modifications to his theory of deterrence, especially its historic roots; Brodie was nobody’s acolyte. Such reflections seem even more pertinent to Kissinger. He was sincere in his expressions of admiration for Liddell

²⁹ André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 12, 13, 14, 22, 57, 99, 110-16, 127, all references are to this edition.

³⁰ Liddell Hart to Beaufre, 15 April; Beaufre to Liddell Hart, 22 April 1964 1/49/139/141; Howard review, *Survival*, 6 No. 3 (May-June 1964), pp. 146-47; *Studies in War and Peace*, p. 182.

Hart's work. The invitation to contribute to Liddell Hart's *festschrift* brought 'me so much pleasure', he later told its honorand. But again, it is their dedication to the limitation of war which brought them together, though they differed in substantial detail as to how this might be achieved; Kissinger specifically warned of the dangers of 'panaceas' in his contribution to *The Theory and Practice of War*.³¹

So where do we leave Liddell Hart's canon? The writer Vita Sackville-West once observed that 'the fun of the historian consists partly in destroying his own theories once he has built them up'.³² Certainly, Liddell Hart's carefully constructed image of himself has been dismantled by historians, though it has not yet been replaced with a coherent, alternative view. It is perhaps no coincidence that the most devastating assaults on Liddell Hart's reputation have come from the United States, notably in John J. Mearsheimer's *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History* (1988).³³ The 'weight' of Mearsheimer's history is directed towards the years before 1945 and he makes too much of Liddell Hart's manipulation of his friends. Howard and Beaufre both owed Liddell Hart a deep debt of gratitude, but this did not prevent them from developing his ideas afresh, discarding them or constructively revising them when required. They of course brought their own preoccupations and the benefit of their diverse experiences to bear on his strategic framework. They found most utility in his ideas concerning strategy and policy. Those that follow their path, especially military men, may find Liddell Hart's operational and tactical ideas equally stimulating. What later commentators should not do is accept uncritically Liddell Hart's own linkage of the various aspects of his work. If Michael Howard is right in thinking that Liddell Hart transformed the nature of military thought, then he and General Beaufre have played a most important part in carrying that transformation forward.

³¹ Brodie to Liddell Hart, 26 April 1957, 3 February, 2 March 1960 1/109/2/13/15; Kissinger, 'American Strategic Doctrine and Diplomacy', in *Theory and Practice of War*, p. 291.

³² V. Sackville-West, *Saint Joan of Arc* (London: Folio Society edition, 1995 [1936]), p. 54.

³³ John J. Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History* (London: Brassey's, 1988).