

comparisons with external or non-Russian powers and their progress towards fighting in future armed conflicts. The publication follows a logical progression from the macro and more general environment of future armed struggle towards the lower end of the spectrum where more specific issues such as features, methods, military systems and the issues of control of the military become the focus.

The way in which the publication draws upon history and external developments erodes the particular focus on future-armed conflict and the Russian connection. Too much emphasis is placed on the US developments and their impact creating a perception of the Russian thinking being a mere reaction to the American advances. Towards the last sections of the publication the concept of future war and the Russian views are downgraded to particular personnel policies and general training rules or procedures. These micro elements could be questioned in terms of their true contribution. The particular training methods and type of training are rather to be found in a training manual than an academic publication with its focus towards conceptualising the future conflict environment.

It is acknowledged that the original publication is of Russian origin and had to be translated. In some instances the translation tends to become somewhat fuzzy. In general however the translation is not an obstacle for those interested in advancing their knowledge on Russian thinking on future warfare. It is of much interest that the object of war is not glorified, but presented as a phenomenon to be avoided. Secondly the Russian thinking is not dramatically different from US thinking and it is obvious that they have no 'surprises' or sudden breakthrough technologies that could place their opposition in jeopardy. The Russian views reflect the notion that present thinking and arsenals are an inherent part of any future ways and means to be developed.

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THE ORIGINS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899-1902

Iain R. Smith

Longman, London and New York: 1995

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Maps

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During the last two decades, Longman has made name in the field of military history with the publication of a series of books on the origins of modern wars. In chronological order the series started with the origins of the French Revolutionary Wars and covered titles on most of the important wars since the eighteenth century, including the two World Wars, Korea, Vietnam and the Arab-Israeli Wars. The titles were not published in chronological order as the wars occurred, but at random, starting with the First World War. Just as well, as Iain Smith's book on the South African War or Second Anglo-Boer War, was published in 1996, three years before the start of the centenary festivities of this war.

Smith joined a long line of writers who tried to determine the causes of this war, which had such a decisive effect on the history of South Africa in the twentieth century. Even as the war was still in progress, writers on both sides wrote pamphlets and books to

justify their cause and blame the other party for the outbreak of war. During the twentieth century this was replaced by a more scientific approach to the study on the causes of the war. Some postgraduate students at South African universities studied it and some authors gained fame for their interpretation on the causes of the war. From the Afrikaans side the two volumes by G.D. Scholtz, *Die Oorsake van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* is well known. J.S. Marais's *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* is another book from a South African perspective on the topic. It is however the reawakening of the interest of British historians in the war since 1979, when Thomas Pakenham's *The Boer War* was first published, that shed a new light on the events leading up to the war.

The advantage that historians during the last three decades had was that for the British, the process of retreat from the Empire was finally completed in most areas of the world. Thus, British historians could easily examine in retrospect the events in the light of the contemporary world. The debate centred on whether economic or political factors caused the war. Smith's approach was that economic factors played a role and he went to great lengths to study the archives of the large financial institutions in South Africa and the United Kingdom to determine the nature of this. In the end, however, he reasoned governments decide to go to war and that the causes of this war also had to be found in the political decisions by the opposing governments.

The first myth that Smith addressed was the overemphasis placed on the causes of the war by Marxist historians, based on the theories of Lenin. He indicated the fact that the so-called big capitalists in Transvaal were not a homogeneous group with exactly the same beliefs. Some, like Sammy Marks, leaned more to the side of Paul Kruger's government and not all who opposed Kruger's ideals were prepared to cause a war over the issue. Smith also showed how the role of Cecil John Rhodes declined after the Jameson raid and that the coming of war after this event was avoidable. In 1896 cool heads prevailed on both sides and war was averted.

Smith is at his most brilliant in analysing the actions of the British government in the enfolding drama after 1896. From his research it is clear that the British government did not plan a war and in fact tried to the end to prevent it. So much so that the Boers had the advantage in the military sphere for at least the first month of the war because the government in London resisted pressure from their military leaders to send more troops to South Africa in order not to provoke the Transvaal government. What is most revealing is the contradicting nature of some of the public statements of the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain and his stance during cabinet meetings. This just comes to show that public speech does not always exactly reflect the intentions of governments, because politicians try to create impressions, which does not always have the same content as the agendas over which they eventually negotiate. Smith could however have analysed the role of the media in Britain in creating the climate for war after the Jameson raid.

The central issue was not so much to incorporate the Transvaal into the empire, but to sustain British supremacy in Southern Africa. Like Thomas Pakenham, Smith saw the appointment of Sir Alfred Milner as British High Commissioner to South Africa as the turning point in the events leading to war. It is exactly the perception of the British government about the threat posed by the economic and military power of Kruger's republic that became the issue. The *Uitlander* franchise issue was very convenient for an ambitious man like Milner who through his actions fuelled the flames of the perception of the government in London that the only way to remove this threat was to threaten Kruger's government into virtual submission or through war. Transvaal's economic power and the fear that even if the franchise were given to the *Uitlanders*, they might be more loyal to South Africa than to the empire was a very important motive for Milner to

try and push the British cabinet to the brink. Thus, when they started sending petitions to the Queen, the British government had to act, so as not to be seen as leaving British subjects in the lurch in an hour of crisis. This in spite of the fact that Kruger's government went a long way in trying to address their grievances and conceded more than what was demanded by Milner during his meeting with Kruger in Bloemfontein in June 1899. But as Smith rightfully indicated, the decision to go to war was taken by the British cabinet and although Milner and Chamberlain contributed to this decision, the British leaders were not really led by the nose by them. It was a decision in terms of the perceived challenge to the position of the Empire in what was regarded as a British sphere of influence during tense times in Europe, which would fifteen years later lead to world war.

Smith went to great lengths to explain that although Germany's role in Southern Africa was a threat to British interests in this regard after the Jameson raid, by 1899 the Kaiser's interests in Southern Africa had declined drastically and he preferred good relations with the British. However, he could have analysed British perceptions more thoroughly. According to Gooch¹ both the War Office and the Royal Navy regarded Germany in the period 1900 - 1902 as the most possible rival in a future war in Europe. Added to this, the Kaiser's erratic behaviour in international politics, it could not have been ruled out completely that Germany could not get involved in South Africa. This British perception should have been taken into consideration.

Smith also tried to describe the events from the point of view of the Transvaal government. He clearly exposed the myth that Kruger aspired to challenge the British hegemony in the subcontinent and that he did not see the Transvaal as the agent for the unification of South Africa under Afrikaner leadership away from the British Empire. Also, that his government was simply a corrupt oligarchy who just wanted to enrich their friends and relatives. A good example is his description of the dynamite and railway concessions, which did not have as motive the enrichment of friends and relatives, but the determination of a besieged government not to allow such strategic assets to be controlled by people who had shown their disloyalty to the state, as the demands of capitalists and the *Uitlanders* on the Rand would have led to. He also indicated the role that Milner played in creating the perception with Kruger and his followers that the British government constantly shifted the goalposts about the franchise issue and in secret conspired to destroy the independence of the Transvaal. This new trend in interpreting the events leading to the outbreak of war in which Smith's findings correspond in broad terms with that of Pakenham, is indicative to the more balanced view by British historians in the aftermath of the empire.

Smith has a reading knowledge of Afrikaans and Dutch but it is clear that he did not really study in depth the long list of Dutch and Afrikaans sources in his bibliography. Thus, he never explained the true meaning of Afrikaner Nationalism in the previous century like the deprivations of the Great Trek, and especially the impact of the first Anglo Boer War and the Boer victory at Majuba in 1881. What were the motives behind expressions such as 'Africa for the Africaanders' and what influence did this have on British thinking in terms of the perceived threat by the economic and military strength of the Transvaal? Smuts wrote on the eve of the war about the possibility that a Boer victory would lead to an Afrikaner republic stretching from Table Bay to the Zambesi. Smith quoted this but, fails to indicate if the British were aware of such sentiments and what influence it had on their perception of the threat that Kruger's republic posed for British

1 'The weary titan: Strategy and Policy in Great Britain, 1890-1918' in W. Murray *et al* (eds.), *The Making of Strategy* (Cambridge 1995), p. 290.

supermacy in South Africa in this regard. Were Smuts's sentiments shared by other Afrikaners, not only in Transvaal but also in the rest of South Africa? These questions need to be answered. Sources like general Jan Kemp's *Vir Vryheid en Reg* and the archives of the secretaries of state of the two republics would have provided him with more insight about Afrikaner motives on the eve of war.

In 1973 Geoffrey Blainey indicated in his book *The Causes of War* that in a situation of tension between different international agents, like governments, the most important factor leading to war is the perception that one stands to lose more by negotiation and to win more by resorting to war. Smith did not explicitly indicate this on the British side, but his description of Milner's actions and the reactions of the British government as described by him corresponds with Blainey's hypothesis. This is aggravated by the attitude that victory in war is achievable at low cost. From the Boer point of view, Smith fails to point this out in spite of the fact that enough evidence exists that there were people in the Transvaal government that thought that a repeat of the victory of 1881 was achievable. Blainey quoted the Boer leader. Schalk Burger is this regard.

Smith also used the presidential election results of 1898 to conclude that the support for Kruger and the decision to resort to war was unchallenged in the Transvaal. Again a closer study of South African sources would have indicated to him the opposition of prominent leaders such as Louis Botha and J.H. de la Rey on the eve of war who did not share in the optimism of the prospects of a Boer victory.

Smith did much to show that Hobson's and Lenin's exposition of the economic causes of the war was an oversimplification of a complex situation. He could however briefly have indicated what Lenin did write, which would have eased the task of comparing his exposition to the Marxist point of view.

The only technical error in the book is on page 1 where the date of 1990 should have been substituted by 1900.

Geyl said that history is a debate without end and Smith's exposition on the causes of the war is a good example of this. Smith analysed the role of Germany in depth in the events leading to war, but did not even mention other European powers that could have gained by a weakening of the British position in Southern Africa. A good example of this is Tsarist Russia, who established diplomatic ties with the Transvaal and was in direct competition with Britain in Asia. In their book *The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, Davidson and Filatova mentioned the fact that Smith did not study the recently opened Russian archives after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They gained access to it in the same year that Smith's book was published. However, Gooch already in 1995 pointed to the fact that the War Office saw the Russian threat to India in a serious light since 1884. A weakening of the British hold on Southern Africa could have aggravated this as the use of forces from India could have weakened the defences of that country. Thus, the book lacks a detailed study of the role of other European powers and the role this played in forming the British perception that the Transvaal under the leadership of Kruger might in future have led to other countries meddling in the affairs of Southern Africa which the British regarded as their sphere of influence.

A reinterpretation from the Afrikaner side is also needed, but all in all, Smith made a substantial contribution to the comprehension to the causes of a war that decisively shaped South African history. I would recommend the book for any laymen as well as professional historian in this centenary year. However, a second edition that address issues like British perceptions about Afrikaner motives and the possible threat by

other European powers such as the Russian empire will substantially contribute to the understanding of the causes of the war.

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF WAR

Martin van Creveld
The Free Press: 1991
254 pages
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"A ghost is stalking the corridors of general staffs and defence departments all over the 'developed' world - the fear of military impotence, even irrelevance. ...As new forms of armed conflict multiply and spread, they **will** cause the lines between public and private, government and people, military and civilian to become as blurred as they were before 1648. ...One very important way in which men can attain joy, freedom, happiness is (through) war." (Van Creveld, 1991: 1, 226, 227)

These are the words that open and conclude this book whose stated objective is to provide a non-Clausewitzian perspective to 'modern' warfare (p ix). In the first two chapters, Van Creveld perceptively addresses the bankruptcy of nuclear weapons and strategy, the declining utility of conventional armed forces and the resurgence of low intensity conflict as well as the resounding political outcomes accrued through such conflicts. Acknowledging Karl von Clausewitz as an outstanding military theoretician, Van Creveld not only delineates the historical context in which Clausewitz's writings were most relevant, but goes on to evoke the works of Colmar von der Goltz (*Das Volk in Waffen*, 1883) and Erich Ludendorff (*Der Totale Krieg*, 1936) in order to clearly distinguish the concept of a trinitarian war in comparison to those of a total war and non-trinitarian war (p 35, 42, 45, 49). "Involving the surgical separation of the state, society and the military, the trinitarian war is compatible with the Clausewitzian prescription and primary notion of war as a continuation of politics" (p 63). While total war appears to be an extreme and perverted form of trinitarian war - it plays a vital role in as far as it nearly obliterated society, facilitated the rise of totalitarian governments and even precipitated the Second World War. This opened the flood gates for the resurgence of non-trinitarian conflict in which individuals and individual societies (not established armies acting on behalf of governments) take up arms in defense of their lives, property and freedom. Adopting the orthodox label of low intensity conflict (LIC) Van Creveld postulates that LIC's are set to become the way of war in the future for which modern armies are not prepared and to which the orthodox Clausewitzian view of warfare and strategy is inapplicable.

Traversing the Geneva Conventions (on prisoners, non-combatants and weapons) the book continues to show how modern warfare has obliterated the trinitarian notion of social relations and warfare. Since conventions define what war is all about, Van Creveld concludes that without laws, to define 'who is allowed to kill whom, for what ends, under what circumstances and by what means', there can be no war (p 93, 225). The chapter on 'How Wars are Fought' provides valuable insights on the development of strategy; how it is affected by technological advances; on inflexibility, friction and uncertainty as the