Christopher Coker

War in an Age of Risk

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CHRISTOPHER COKER

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Every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions and its own peculiar preoccupations. It follows that the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities.

Clausewitz, *On War*

War: the possibility at last exists that war may be defeated on the linguistic plane. If war is an extreme metaphor we may defeat it by devising metaphors that are even more extreme.

J. G. Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium*

Preface

'Mine is the first generation able to contemplate the possibility that we may live our entire lives without going to war or sending our children to war', claimed Tony Blair, speaking at the beginning of his premiership (*Economist*, 12 May 2007). He spoke with the confidence of a man who knew little history. Assertions that we have seen the end of war are pretty commonplace these days, yet most can be dismissed as the hollow echoes of a misplaced Kantian confidence in the future. Many when examined carefully seem to be interesting only as evidence of a recurring need to find something different to say.

Blair went on to fight five wars and was eventually forced out of office by the last, Iraq. He soon found that we do not live only in the present; during our lives the past is constantly relived or renegotiated. He failed to grasp the power of the past to contaminate the present. His problem was that he had a sense of destiny – but not history with all its cyclical repetitions. In the course of his ten years in power, history provoked ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, spurred ancient tribal enmities in Afghanistan and tapped into stubbornly persistent religious hatreds between Sunni and Shia in Iraq.

The wars he went on to fight, moreover, were an authentic expression of our age. Every age, Clausewitz tells us, must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities, its distinguishing features, its preoccupations, even nightmares. In the case of the West it is not difficult to detect a Hegelian Zeitgeist, the notion that there is a common spirit of the times discernible in everything we do. *Geist*, loosely translated, means 'spirit' though it can refer to the mind as well as the intellectual and cultural landscape of our existence. The nineteenth century believed every age had a 'spirit'. The idea was poetic and for that reason appealing. And it appeals still for it permits us to make broad generalizations about the sweep of history and thus invest it with 'meaning'. Some of these generalizations are even true; the challenge is to distinguish what the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead called 'general climates of opinion' that may persist for a long time, from the

'shorter waves of thought which play on the surface of things' (Lewis 1993: 229).

In this study I shall invite the reader to look at the general climate through the eyes of sociologists, anthropologists, economists and others who address the subject of risk – the definitive theme of the age. On a Google search in September 2007 I found 347 million hits. To peep though the prism of risk is to shatter the monolith of life into myriad patterns but the fractured rhythms of this study are intended to cohere into a thesis. The eclectic range of authors upon whom I shall draw are there for a reason: to illustrate my principal thesis that war has become risk management in all but name, and that the risk age itself represents not 'a shorter wave of thought' but an entire era.

From Ulrich Beck I have taken the idea of risk as the predominant reality of our times, now recast specifically in terms of war as risk management. From another sociologist, Frank Furedi, I have borrowed the concept that we live in a culture of fear that long pre-dated the War on Terror. From Zygmunt Bauman I take the insight that our world has been liquefied and rendered more fragile with the demise of the 'long-term'. In each case I have tried to ground the way the West thinks about war in what Clausewitz calls its cultural 'grammar'.

Clausewitz tells us that every age fights wars in its own ways, which is why every era of war has its own defining characteristics. This is what he means by the word 'grammar' but it is not a word that comes easily to mind when looking at ourselves. When you speak your own language grammar is usually the last thing you learn; when you begin to study a foreign language it is usually the first. For the role of grammar is to make conscious the ways in which language unites meaning and function. Grammar is difficult for those who already know a language because meaning and function are fused and seem indivisible. This is why we often know so little about ourselves and why I have chosen to use the work of sociologists in this study in an attempt to throw light on the reasons why we practise war as we now do.

A preface's function is by definition to be prefatory, and space permits me to make only one further point by way of clarification. Although the word 'grammar' is very important, so is another that Clausewitz didn't use – 'language'. Its use is in keeping with a general mood in intellectual history. We speak these days of the 'languages' that different societies speak and the 'vocabularies' which structure every era's understanding of the world and how it works. 'The limits of my language are the limits of my world,' Wittgenstein insisted, somewhat gnomically. We can even speak of the

'mentalities' of different ages, provided we recognize that the meaning is not psychological. In his book *Demystifying Mentalities* G. E. Lloyd challenges all theories that suggest different cultures have distinct styles of reasoning, such as Vivian Levy-Bruhl's belief in a 'primitive mentality', or James Frazer's notion of magic, religious and scientific mentalities as the three historical stages through which higher civilizations have to ascend to realize their full potential. In discussing the significant differences between cultures and even between historical eras Lloyd is much more interested in discovering what questions they were trying to answer and identifying the different problems they were trying to solve. Lloyd finds that historical ages differ in styles of enquiry. The questions we ask define our age (Lloyd 1990). Every age then has its own 'language', its own mentality – it is these that give war a distinctive 'grammar'.

Every society, of course, asks, 'How safe is safe enough?' As human beings we are programmed to avoid risks, particularly those that constitute a 'clear and present danger'. But we are also programmed to take them. Biology explains the first, culture the second. What makes our age unique is that risk aversion is now so entrenched in the collective consciousness that we tend to write off almost all risk-taking as abnormal, or pathological (Douglas 1992: 41). What makes our age different again is that there is no necessary correspondence between our risk perceptions and the 'real' or 'objective' risks out there. Because of the questions we raise, the practice of war has become even more challenging for those governments or societies that still wish to remain in the war business.

'Our challenge in this new century is a difficult one,' remarked the former US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, '(it is) to defend our nation against the unknown, the uncertain, the unseen and the unexpected.' This language has become the hallmark of the risk age. 'To accomplish (the task),' he went on, 'we must put aside comfortable ways of thinking and planning . . . [we must] take risks and try new things' (Devji 2007:157). War is evolving to meet this challenge; risk-taking is being recalibrated as precisely as we can. The grammar of war is different today from the one with which we were most familiar during the Cold War – why and in what ways is the subject of this book.

I am not the first pioneer in this field. Sociologists with a few exceptions are not much interested in war, and the security community, though interested in military sociology, is not much interested in venturing into deeper waters. But three of my former students have written three excellent books on war which embody the scholarship of writers such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck: Yee Kwang Heng, *War as Risk Managemen*t (2006), Mikkel

Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War* (2007) and Michael Williams, *NATO, Risk and Security Management from Kosovo to Kandahar* (2008). This book owes much to their work, but it does not seek to replicate what they have written. Instead it offers a different perspective – it is about the risk age itself as a response to the increasing complexity of life.

In the first chapter I shall sketch three case studies of the risk society at war; in the second I will attempt to foreground the risk age in the era that came before it when war seemed to be a condition of modern life. One age gives way to another slowly; historians are always spotting trends that anticipate the times to come. I shall trace the risk age back to the twentieth century's acute anxieties about the risks of going to war which began to transform the century in unexpected ways long before academics began writing about the risk society. The unexpected in history is always waiting out there. As the novelist Philip Roth once claimed, the main reason we study history is to discover how the unexpected becomes the inevitable.

In chapter 3 I will sketch the principal features of the risk age which have encouraged us to reconceptualize security in completely new ways, and to see war as an exercise in risk management. In chapter 4 I shall explain that when we go to war, or use military force for distinctive political ends, we are acutely conscious that everything has side-effects; we are aware that the consequences of our own actions can rebound on us; we are saddled with the knowledge that through our own actions we may pose the greatest threat to ourselves. Ours is an age of consequence management, and this is especially true when it comes to war.

In the fifth chapter I will sketch the new geopolitical imagination which takes risk as its defining principle in addressing three major challenges: terrorism, the rise of China and the negative aspects of globalization. The risk-management strategies are different in each case. Ours is not an ambitious age – quite the contrary. We are no longer in the business of nation-building; we have scaled down our strategic ambition. Our military interventions are largely tactically driven as I shall seek to explain with reference to the language we now employ when engaging in such intractable problems as Afghanistan: we tend to see countries less as states than 'complex adaptive systems', and the problems we try to address are 'wicked', not 'tame'.

In the final chapter I shall suggest that the risk age itself is only the latest stage of modernity and that history will move on sooner or later. At the heart of the paradox that constitutes the risk age is the fact that other societies are willing to take very great risks indeed. It is their predisposition for risk-taking that may force us to confront and overcome our own predisposition to be risk-averse.

Some critics of the risk society are predisposed to seeing 'the pervasive acceptance of risk governance' as oppressive (Aradau et al. 2008:151). I tend to find it hollow. There is a marvellous passage in James Blinn's novel *The Aardvark is Ready for War* which came to mind when I was completing this book. 'What am I afraid of', asks one of the characters in the novel which does for the Gulf War (1990–1) what Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* did for World War II:

> I am afraid of everything. You think war scares me? It does but so does nuclear winter, and fall out from Chernobyl, and Legionnaire's disease and killer bees . . . and crude nuclear devices and strip mining, and the vanishing rain forest and AIDS . . . and rising interest rates and falling interest rates and people with accents and Third World population growth . . . and botulism and E. Coli and unnamed Amazonian viruses and the little petro-skin floating on my coffee. I am afraid of my ignorance and things I can't see. But the main thing that frightens me is fear. Fear of fear, that is what I am suffering from. (Blinn 1997:127)

Blinn's hero is a product of the risk age. In quasi-Hegelian terms I would argue that the chief external threat which the risk society is fighting is its own inherent essence.

1

The Risk Society at War

The most difficult moment for an author observing an era and trying to identify what makes it distinctive comes at the very beginning, for the infinite variety of life moves in a continuous surge and everything for its explanation has to be referred to things that happened before. So how can one begin? How, so to speak, can one nose one's vehicle into the uninterrupted course of traffic? One device is to choose a convenient base and from it to look at the way, in the case of this study, military force has been used since 1990.

In order to do this I am going to move geographically around the 'arc of extremism' as the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review* called the region that stretches from the Middle East to northeast Asia (*QDR* 2001). It is a region, argues retired general Anthony Zinni, that is a breeding ground for instability, insurgencies and warlords, 'a Petri dish for extremism and for terrorist networks' (Osinga 2007:52). Zinni was a regional commander in the 1990s and he should know what he is talking about, because the War on Terror was foreshadowed much earlier in the first Gulf War (1990–1). It was the inconclusive nature of that conflict which was held responsible by some of President George W. Bush's inner circle of advisers for what happened in New York on 9/11. And it was the World Trade Center attack which precipitated the invasion of Iraq in 2003 which followed the war against Taliban in Afghanistan which is still continuing.

Packing a long perspective in a short time frame, I am going to look at each event in turn. What each illustrates is the existence of a different consciousness, a realization that war has changed in a way that gives the age its own distinctive style.

Case Study 1: The Gulf War and its Discontents

In 2003 the conservative columnist and writer P. J. O'Rourke visited the island of Iwo Jima in the company of a group of high-flying US Marine Corps cadets. The essay he penned after the visit is entitled 'Iwo Jima and

the end of modern war'. On that island – which the historian William Manchester in his memoir of the Pacific War described as 'an ugly, smelly glob of cold lava squatting in a surly ocean', the Americans lost 6,000 men in thirty-six days of fighting, of which 2,400 perished on the first day alone. Of 353 Congressional Medals of Honor awarded during World War II twenty-seven were given for heroism on Iwo Jima – thirteen posthumously. After the flag was raised on Mount Suribachi the Secretary of the Navy, James Forestall, who happened to be present, proclaimed 'this means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years' (O'Rourke 2005:189). The iconic picture of the flag flying was later rendered in bronze at the Marine Corps War Memorial in Washington DC.

To O'Rourke and the young marines who accompanied him on his battlefield jaunt the battle though heroic might as well have occurred 500 years earlier. Because what was demanded of the Americans at Iwo Jima is no longer demanded of them today. They do not face military hordes by the thousand in all-out attacks. Today 96,000 uniformed troops are not thrown into a small space on the map. Combat has become a less crowded affair. And the US military is more dependent on machines and communication systems and less on men. Iwo Jima reminded O'Rourke of the astonishing slaughter of war in the modern age. He nominated the battle as important 'for its ugliness, its uselessness and its remoteness from all things of concern to the post-modern era' (O'Rourke 2004:187). As the US prepared to invade Iraq that summer Iwo Jima seemed a world away from what contemporary war has become, or is in the process of becoming.

The same was even more true of the first Gulf War which, in retrospect, can be seen as the first conflict of the risk age. For the invasion of Kuwait which provoked it had actually been foreseen – the US military had even gamed for it the year before. The risk age puts a premium on anticipating events; scenario planning has become the norm, although it was first perfected in the closing years of the Cold War. The present age fears the unpredictable. A scenario is a tool for ordering one's perceptions about alternative future environments in which today's decisions might play out. Scenarios involve a set of stories based on carefully constructed plots – put more simply they are a way of rehearsing the future (Strathern 2007:243) The problem with the method is not failing to predict events (the US did predict the invasion of Kuwait, just as it later predicted the 9/11 attacks); the problem is a human one – it is the failure to act on them. The brutal logic of risk is that it is cheaper to pay to deal with the aftermath of a disaster (if it is localized) than it is to prepare for the same event in different theatres; there is a huge difference between anticipating an event and being prepared

for it. The US could have deterred Saddam from invading Kuwait but deterrence would have been expensive – in the event it was caught out when Saddam struck.

The Gulf War (1990–1) which followed was not cheap, though it was the first war for which the US issued an invoice: Saudi Arabia, Japan and Germany all paid for the campaign. And when it came it took the world by storm. The air war lasted six weeks; the land campaign only a hundred hours. It was described at the time as the first *hyperwar* in history because of its unprecedented precision bombing and its use of strategic surprise which rendered it so strikingly different from everything we know about modern battles such as Iwo Jima. The 'star' of the show, the F117A (the Stealth Attack bomber), was used for the first time to attack heavily defended targets such as command and control posts, air defence radar systems and military production facilities. They flew 1,300 sorties and delivered about 2,000 bombs. Of these over two-thirds fell within ten feet of the intended aim point. Considering the destructive force of a 2,000-pound bomb it is likely that 80 per cent of the bombs destroyed their assigned targets. This level of precision had never been witnessed before: it has made war more lethal but also less destructive. Destruction from the air is now highly specific, but wholesale within its own specificity. The plane of the hour, the F117A, was also marvellously risk-averse for the pilots flying them; during Desert Storm not one of them was lost to enemy fire (Nye/Smith 1992:252–3).

But despite all the hype the result of Desert Storm was strikingly inconclusive, even though it met the terms of the UN mandate under which it was launched. Saddam himself remained in power for the next twelve years. At a press conference two days after announcing the ceasefire President George H. W. Bush regretted that he could not share the same sense of euphoria as the American people. As long as Saddam was still there he could not provide them with the closure that his own generation had been given after Japan's surrender (Bush himself had had a distinguished career as a pilot in the Pacific theatre where he had flown 58 combat missions and received the Distinguished Air Service Medal). 'You mentioned World War 2,' the President told a journalist. 'There was a definite end to that conflict. And now we have Saddam Hussein still there – the man who wreaked the havoc upon his neighbours' (Buley 2007:79).

His survival committed the Coalition to a long siege which it knew at any time could be broken. Victory in war tends to last only as long as the coalition that produces it remains intact. Take the collapse of the Allied coalition against Russia that had imposed terms on the country in 1856.

With France out of the equation following its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1), Russia was able to tear up the terms of the Treaty of Paris and restore the *status quo ante*. Similarly, the coalition which defeated Saddam Hussein soon dissolved, leaving only Britain and the US after 1995 to face him down by the overt threat of military action and the occasional use of force.

Hostilities were to continue for the next twelve years as UN arms inspectors laboured away at ending Saddam's nuclear programme until their expulsion in 1998. This in turn provoked Operation Desert Fox (1998), a three-day cruise missile blitz on Baghdad that destroyed what was left of the programme although this was not recognized until years later. Even the war on land continued in an attenuated form in the north, in the Kurdish areas, where a civil war was later to claim 3,000 lives.

Air power was the West's preferred option in the phase that followed the liberation of Kuwait. After the end of hostilities the Coalition continued to patrol two no fly zones in Iraq, one above the 36th parallel in the north, the other below the 33rd in the south. Both were established to protect the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs after their uprisings failed to unseat the regime. No fly zones were mandated by the Security Council on 5 April which deemed the Iraqi repression of these minorities to be a 'threat to international security'. In the course of time the air missions (some 200,000 sorties in all) became less an instrument for protecting those at risk on the ground and more a means of constraining the Iraqi leader's freedom of action by keeping the regime under constant surveillance. The mission was aptly named Operation Northern Watch. When George W. Bush sanctioned the first air sortie of his presidency in February 2001 he described the mission as 'routine' (*Washington Post*, 27 February 2001).

At another press conference in 1991, a few days after the formal end of hostilities, Bush announced almost casually that the sanctions imposed in the run-up to Desert Storm would continue until the regime had been removed from power. Yet the sanctions regime imposed by the UN was progressively watered down on humanitarian grounds (oil for food/medicine) and subverted by massive corruption within the UN itself. They still did enormous damage to ordinary Iraqis, decimating the country's middle class and reducing it to the status of a semi-criminalized economy. Over the next few years Basra was transformed from a wealthy city into a slum. By the time of the invasion in 2003 Iraq was poorer, its people more desperate and isolated, and the regime apparently more entrenched than ever. Isolation from the West was a virus which slowly killed the nation long before the Coalition forces inadvertently, of course, almost finished it off.

The mood of frustration was captured by some of the key Hollywood films that came off the production line in the 1990s. Take the scene in Wolfgang Petersen's *Air Force One* (1997) when the plane carrying President James Marshall, as played by Harrison Ford, is seized by Kazak terrorists while he is being briefed on a suspected Iraqi mobilization. In another film, *Independence Day*, which had hit the movie theatres the previous year, Bill Pullman's even younger Commander in Chief, Thomas Whitmore, is defined again and again by his service as a fighter pilot in the Gulf War. The repeated references to Iraq in the movie culminate in the nod of approval exchanged by Iraqi and Israeli pilots as they prepare to leave a desert airbase for the final assault against the invading aliens. America's commitment to 'whippin ET's butt' has even neutralized the aggression of one of the world's most dangerous states. 'At least America has a kick-ass President' was one of the original taglines for the movie. Although it was later rejected by the studio, it captured a widespread feeling of frustration that Desert Storm was a war that had not been declared, not fought to a conclusion and not truly won. The job had been left uncompleted (Handy 1997).

In outlining the principal reasons for this, which made the Gulf War the first conflict of the risk age, I am going to take my lead (at some risk to myself) from a book by the sociologist Jean Baudrillard, one of the leading figures in post-modernism and the theorist of the hyperreal. *La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu* (*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*; an obvious parody of Giraudoux's play *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*) is composed of three essays: 'The Gulf War will not take place' (which originally appeared in *Libération* and was translated for and reprinted in the *Guardian*), 'The Gulf War is not really taking place' (originally published in *Libération*) and 'The Gulf War did not take place' (written for book publication only).

The problem with his work is that it is often annoyingly obscure. Baudrillard liked to provoke his readers, as French intellectuals have been doing since the mid-nineteenth century. Many of them like to 'dazzle' (the French word, *briller* has no real English equivalent). He was something of a self-professed 'poseur' like his compatriots Lacan, Foucault and Julia Kristeva, and like them he could be stubbornly obscure. But although obscure he was also a scintillating critic of our times, especially on the constructed nature of reality. He may have taken great pride in the subversive nature of his critique but we should take his wish to subvert seriously. Subversive writers are often the best commentators on our times. The Gulf War seems to have appealed to his sense of the subversive in that it appeared to 'subvert' most of the norms of war which the Western world had taken for granted. What astonished him is what should astonish every sociologist

of our age and its obsessive preoccupation with risk aversion: risk aversion is a cultural construct demanding explanation. For the avoidance of risks involves serious risks too.

His aphoristic style and essay technique almost inevitably annoyed many of his fellow sociologists. He never engaged in field research and provided little data to support his propositions. The three essays he wrote on Desert Storm comprise a series of telling vignettes held together by a rather rambling commentary on hyperreality, lightened with an occasional touch of grotesque humour. They have been dismissed by some as a set of variations without a theme, and by others as a series of vanities awaiting a bonfire. But Baudrillard was a serious social thinker. Indeed, his wider philosophy and reputation would be largely unintelligible without the ongoing predicaments that make our age so intensely self-reflexive. As he wrote in the run-up to the fighting, 'what is at stake . . . is war itself; its status, its meaning, its future' (Baudrillard 1995:32).

All reflection is derived from the difference between appearance and reality. This is entirely a human discovery. Other species are stuck in an evolutionary rut, in a world of appearances. They have to make the best they can of how things seem, and seldom if ever worry about whether how things seem is actually how things are. We invented culture, writes Daniel Dennett, in order to leverage ourselves into new territory (Dennett 2003:165). Over time we have been forced to reflect more frequently as the gap between appearance and reality has widened, as we have come to recognize that we can never grasp all at once the increasing complexity of the world. In the risk age we are forced to reflect even more on our circumstances because the cost of getting it wrong has risen so greatly.

To be a risk society, however, is not just to ask oneself more questions, or to be even more troubled by doubt. A risk society has to accept ambivalence as a condition of its own existence. Insecurity, not security, is now the norm, but at levels that we may find more acceptable. The future cannot be secured but it can be made 'safer'. War can still produce more favourable outcomes (if we are lucky) but it is always a double-edged sword. For those who endanger the well-being of the international community and those charged with its protection may well be identical (even if in the case of the latter by default – the failure to anticipate the unintended consequences of their own actions). It was said that Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time of Desert Storm, displayed on his desk a quotation from Thucydides: 'Of all forms of power restraint is the best.' Actually, Thucydides never said it, but the quip has much greater resonance in our age than his. For it is no longer possible to

externalize risks; we now internalize them as never before. This is what makes our societies so self-critical.

Reflection and reflexivity are quite different, despite what the adjective 'reflexive' might suggest, for the latter involves an element of *self-confrontation*. It is not only a question of fearing the consequences of war; it is fearing the consequences of our own actions. We have become acutely aware that we may pose the greatest danger to ourselves.

And although we have certainly reflected on wars in the past, on their consequences and even the cost of success (pyrrhic victories have been quite common), when going to war today we are engaged in self-confrontation as never before. 'With risks, avoidance imperatives dominate' (Beck 1992:9). Once something becomes a 'problem in itself' the issue of self-limitation comes to the fore. We entertain concepts of damage limitation, consequence management, safety, monitoring and responsibility even before the first shot has been fired. We debate responsibility for the risks we run when targeting other societies and the risks we ask others to run even after the shooting has stopped. Within alliances we are intensely preoccupied with who takes the risks and who shares them by association. And, of course, we are all acutely risk-averse.

In order to make war possible for itself, argued Baudrillard, the US had to cast the war as comparatively risk-free. The public was encouraged to see it as 'a war without the symptoms of war, a form of war which means never needing to face up to war' (Baudrillard 1995:43). In order to minimize the public's anxieties the Bush administration had to reassure it that the war would be largely risk-free. In this respect Desert Storm was not so much a 'hyperwar' as it was 'hyperreal'. For the outcome was never in doubt: the US never had to confront the prospect of defeat. Nothing was really 'real': the Iraqi air force flew to Iran where it was promptly impounded; the Iraqi army did not even bother seriously to contest Kuwait City. At no time was the Coalition's superiority made more manifest than in the closing hours of the ground war, when the Iraqi army was pummelled from the air as it tried to escape from disaster along the scarred ribbon of the Basra highway.

One of the war's 'selling points' was that it posed a much reduced risk of 'collateral damage'. Writing at the time in the *Guardian*, the author J. G. Ballard even hazarded that the absence of combatants, let alone the dead and the wounded, on the nation's television screens every night suppressed any reflexes of pity or outrage, and even created the barely conscious impression that the entire war was 'a vast demolition derby' in which almost no one was being hurt and which might even have been fun for all concerned – but especially for the Americans (Ballard 1997:11).

For Ballard and so many other spectators, in this, the first war to be televised in real time, what mattered most was not that the US overwhelmed the enemy but that the outcome was 'pre-programmed'. The war was scripted in advance and the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) was part of the script. So were phrases like 'full-dimensional protection', 'full spectrum dominance' and 'precision engagement'. These were the ideological inflections of the 1990s discourse on war. Inadvertently they disclosed the military's ambition for what the RMA promised – in the words of one US general, the chance 'to abolish Clausewitz'. It was a bold claim because Clausewitz is the man whose work has produced many of the axioms the military has taken for granted, including his insistence that in any war chance and friction can never be eliminated, and with them the risk that every conflict entails. John Warden was later to claim that 'dominant battle space awareness' had given way to 'predictive battle space awareness'. One government official went even further. In planning for the future, he remarked, the US military could discard the traditional inductive approach (i.e. learning from history and experience) in favour of a deductive method: it could now posit what the future would look like without reference to the past (Buley 2007:87).

The words we use reveal a lot, and the terms associated with the RMA – 'transformation', 'precision', 'digitization' said it all. All downplayed the existential value of battle-hardened combat; all played up a degree of control in an era in which the US military boasted that it enjoyed 'full spectrum dominance'. The Pentagon tried to tap into what a character in Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* calls 'the zero-sumness of the world, the digital imperative, one which promises 'an order at some deeper level' in the general chaos and mayhem of life through the rare power of the computer to compute the future. 'Computer power eliminates doubt. All doubt rises from past experience. But the past is disappearing. We used to know the past but not the future. This is changing too' (Updike 2007:487). Only in recent years has the US found that the RMA is merely the latest in a long wish-list of techno-scientific panaceas that have been sold as benefits without costs – they also include the 'peaceful atom', the space programme and modern eugenics (the ghost in the machine that haunts genetic engineering).

Desert Storm wasn't without its casualties, however. No war is, even if the final casualty toll is still debated. Baudrillard himself even acknowledged this after the fighting had stopped. A 'clean war ends up in an oil slick', he wrote in reference to the gratuitous burning of Kuwait's oil wells by the Iraqis as they pulled out of the country (Baudrillard 1995:43). It was an outrageous act which polluted the region and provided one of the iconic