Introduction

Strategic studies as a discipline has been the subject of much contention for decades. Its achievements have often been questioned by its critics. It has been criticised by many as a rootless and superficial field and its demise has been foretold many times, particularly after the end of the Cold War, when its relevance was repeatedly called into question. The aim of this paper, therefore, in this inaugural issue of the *Australian Journal of Strategic and Defence Studies* is to address three broad themes in the field of strategic studies.

First, what do we mean by strategic studies? Defining it is not a particularly difficult matter; what is more problematic is its relationship with the fields of international relations (IR) and security studies. The debate concerning this triangular relationship has been quite intense as it has involved the important issue of delineating the boundaries of disciplines that are intricately related.

Second, when was strategic studies born? The common assumption is that it arose out of the crisis posed by the onset of the Cold War and the emergence of nuclear weapons, specifically the hydrogen bomb, which presented human beings with the specter of total annihilation. However, we have too often ignored the role of a figure in its birth: Edward Mead Earle, the American historian whose writings and policy prescriptions from before the Second World War were important to the emergence of the field. Nonetheless, strategic studies took off with the advent of nuclear weapons and the onset of the Cold War between the West and the Soviet bloc. Its historical trajectory from the 1950s to the end of the Cold War deserve a brief overview. What countries led in the field and why? Why was there no strategic studies in the Third World—now the Global South—in the early decades? This paper will suggest a number of speculative and intuitive answers to why it took so long to take off in the Global South and why it remained a predominantly a Global North, and particularly...
an Anglo-Saxon (American, British and Australian), enterprise for so long, though with notable contributions from another major Western power, France.

Third, this paper will address the wide-ranging set of criticisms that have been levied against strategic studies since its emergence in the 1950s. Strategic studies has withstood the many attacks launched against its contributions, which have been variously described as meagre, immoral or even promoting bellicosity among states. As long as mankind insists on the use of force in inter-state relations, there will always be a need and a place for those who study war and violence in the international system. Whether they do it for the academic cumulation of knowledge or for the practical purpose of helping the policymakers and militaries of their respective states navigate the dangers lurking in the international system, there will always be a need for strategic studies.

What is strategic studies?

We must start with the term strategy. Volumes have been written about what it means. The word strategy comes from strategos—ancient Greek for general or military commander—and there many derivatives of the word associated with military endeavour. The word strategy did not enter European military lexicon until the 18th century. Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian officer and author of On War who is more often quoted than read, wrote in his magus opus that strategy was ‘the use of the engagement for the object of the war.’ While concise, Clausewitz’s definition was narrow. Over time, it has expanded to mean the pursuit of national goals by the threat or use of military force. While other instruments of achieving national goals were considered, force was the ultima ratio of the state in the international system. As British officer Colonel A.J. Trythall wrote, ‘strategy is the art of using, or threatening to use, military force to achieve political goals.’ In his lengthy treatise, Modern Strategy, Colin Gray defined strategy as ‘the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy.’

Defining strategic studies

As Pascal Vennesson writes, strategic studies is ‘an inter-disciplinary field of study which at its core examines the preparation, threat, use, control and consequenc-es of organized force for political purposes in the course of a dynamic interaction

of at least two competing wills.’ What comes out clearly here is that the defining characteristics are force and military power. Strategic studies is multi-disciplinary in that it is inherently parasitic, which is not meant in a derogatory sense; rather it is a field of study that draws on methods, concepts and inputs of knowledge from other disciplines such as anthropology, geography, history (in particular military history), sociology and economics. Strategic studies is a practical field of study, a major task of which—as one of the early leading American strategic scholars, Bernard Brodie opined—is to be ‘an intellectual aid to official performance.’ This was a point reinforced in contemporary times by Colin Gray, who reminds us that those who are in the field ‘understand themselves to be engaged in the pursuit of socially useful knowledge.’

What is the relationship between international relations, strategic studies and security studies?

The debate has been endless and can only be summarised. Firstly, political science, is the study of how states and societies allocate values, resources and benefits. International relations, which is a sub-set of political science, is the study of inter-state interactions. States in the international system interact in many ways; one of these ways is through the use of or threat to use force against each other. Since strategic studies is the study of the actual or potential use of force by states, would it be a correct deduction that strategic studies is therefore a sub-field of international relations? Yes, it would be.

The philosophical foundations of strategic studies stem largely from the school of realism within international relations. The Realists see the world as it is, not as how people might want it to be. Human beings are not perfect as they often succumb to various lusts, desires and covet other people’s belongings and resources. This is not to argue that human nature has been unchanged and unchanging since the emergence of man; a stand-point that Norman Angell took to task in his chapter on ‘Human Nature’ in his famous book The Great Illusion. The key actor in human society is the state, defined —as derived from the sociologist Max Weber— as an entity having the monopoly of violence within its own defined territorial bounds (a major issue in contemporary international politics since many states do not meet that criteria at all). Domestic politics is characterised by a state of affairs where

the state: (a) plays a role in the authoritative allocation of resources and benefits, (b) controls the instruments of violence, and (c) ‘disciplines’ the population within its boundaries to accept its legitimacy and authority. At least that is the theory, it took centuries of bloody practice to get there in the West.

As the most oft-quoted theorist of international relations, Hans Morgenthau, put it, international politics is different from domestic politics. The Realists argue that the international system is anarchical. They do not mean chaotic; indeed, order and stability have been a norm in the international system. What they mean is that there is no super-arching (world) government that can maintain order among states and ensure that they ‘stay in line’. States are driven into the logic of ‘self-help’ to provide for the defence of their territory, sovereignty, and people. To defend itself, the state must develop military power and threaten to use, or actually use, that instrument if need be. Unfortunately, while all states are juridically equal, to paraphrase George Orwell, some states are more equal than others. There is a hierarchy of power in the international system since some states have more of it than others.9

While we have addressed the relationship between strategic studies and international relations, we now have to address the connection between strategic studies and security studies. Most scholars agree that security studies is a sub-field of international relations.10 So what is security studies? This is important to address because if both strategic studies and security studies are sub-fields of international relations, what then distinguishes them from one another? Some scholars have written that these two sub-disciplines are ‘close cousins’.11 Others have opined that while security studies is a sub-discipline of international relations, strategic studies, in turn, is a sub-discipline of security studies.12

The key term in security studies is the word security, which has been defined generally as the absence of threat to one’s values, resources, and existence. Whose values, resources, and existence are we talking about? Traditionally, the referent of security—the entity to be secured—was the state. Security studies advocates have argued that security studies casts a much wider net than strategic studies. The entity to be secured could be human beings, a society or a community. Furthermore,

9 The key tenets of Realism are to be found in Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War; Nicolo Machiavelli, The Prince, E.H. Carr, The Twenty Years Crisis, Hans Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, Kenneth Waltz, The Structure of International Politics. Its significance and relevance has been debated for decades. I am interested here in providing a summary of its tenets; see Michael Joseph Smith, Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger, Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, (1986), 1-25;
in many cases around the world, the state has been the source of threat to entities existing within its domain. Finally, security studies addresses threats that go beyond the ‘merely’ military ones. States, communities and human beings face exposure to a wide range of threats such as those stemming from disease, terrorism, pollution, lack of adequate supplies of water, refugee flows, malnourishment and famine, and environmental degradation. Some of these threats are ones that it is difficult to apply force against in the traditional sense. In conclusion, it makes sense to many theorists to conceive of strategic studies as the narrow sub-discipline of security studies that deals with the exercise of force and use of military power by states against one another, while security studies – the wider sub-discipline of international relations – deals with the vast panoply of threats that afflict most countries.

The birth and evolution of strategic studies

Strategic studies originated in the inter-war period but took off in the aftermath of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War.

The First World War is a useful starting point to put into perspective what ultimately prompted certain individuals and institutions to view the role of armed force in a different light. The ‘Great War’ was a cataclysm of global proportions that had led to the death and injury of millions and hellish destruction. For Europeans, the war was a psychological trauma. The military mind was held responsible for much of the tragedy that had unfolded, although civilians did not escape censure. Nonetheless, some observers—such as military journalist, Herbert Sidebotham of the (Manchester) Guardian and later of the Times—suggested that the ‘civilian mind has very important and probably decisive contributions to make to the future art and practice of war, and future success or failure will depend mainly on the degree to which these contributions are used or neglected.’

Post-war intellectuals and academics were among these civilians who began to devote their energies to the phenomenon of war. The field of international relations emerged in the aftermath of the war and divergent views concerning the roles of force and military power became discernible. For some, it became their mission to educate humanity and policy-makers of the incontrovertible ‘truth’ that war was a disease that must be eradicated, not managed. Eradication of war was Quincy Wright’s mission. As political scientist David Baldwin put it, Wright saw war as ‘a disease to be cured, rather than an instrument of statecraft’.

and thinkers were equally effected by what the First World War had wrought but came to different conclusions about the role of force and military power: that they are a reality, and have been instruments of statecraft for as long as people can remember. For major international relations’ scholars, such as the Sprouts, Nicholas Spykman and Arnold Wolfers among others, these ideas did not constitute strategic studies as we know it, but rather were the acknowledgement of the centrality of military power in international relations.

The origins of strategic studies

We have to start with the generally unappreciated Edward Mead Earle. Indeed, he was truly ‘present at the creation’, so to speak.16 Earle was a diplomatic historian who began to disengage from history and focus on ‘military defence’ and security issues from 1937 onwards, as it became increasingly obvious that certain states within the international system were again hell-bent on beating a path to war. As an American, he was naturally concerned by the palpable intellectual and material lack of preparedness of the United States for what was about to engulf the world. In a little-known paper from 1942, Earle began:

It is a striking paradox that, although military defense has been a perennial problem of the American people, there has been until recently, no conscious, integrated, and continuous study of military security as a fundamental problem of government and society.17

American scholars, he continued, have shown a crippling incuriosity concerning the role of war in human affairs, despite the fact that human beings live in a ‘warlike world’, that the US has been a participant in various wars and that, indeed, it was currently [i.e. in 1942] ‘engaged in a vast intercontinental war’. The nation and its statesmen must understand the role military force plays in the maintenance of order and stability, otherwise the United States would not have security, he argued. Earle lamented the fact that political and other social scientists had not seriously contended with defence and strategic matters. Earle pointed out in 1943, up until that time America had not produced a strategic studies thinker of the stature of a Machiavelli, Guibert, Jomini or Clausewitz.

Earle is chiefly remembered for bringing together over twenty contributors to produce The Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler in 1943. Most of them were historians, including emigres from Europe, particularly from France and Germany. As editor of the volume, he wrote the introduction, which provides yet another window into his realist-based thinking about strategic issues.

He opens his introduction with the statement, ‘When war comes it dominates our lives.’ War in the 20th century has become total for many reasons. Ideology plays a role: the ideologies of the totalitarian states glorify war and make it total, forcing democracies to follow suit. War is total because of the material resources required to wage it and because the demands of war seep into every nook and cranny of people’s lives. Rather than succumb to the siren song of those within our societies who ‘deprecate its significance in history,’ Earle asserts we must study it. The purpose of *The Makers of Modern Strategy* he said was to ‘enable Anglo-Saxon readers to comprehend the causes of war and the fundamental principles which govern the conduct of war.’ It is, of course, too easy from a contemporary perspective to raise an eyebrow at Earle’s use of the term Anglo-Saxon in this context, which is particularly ironic given the nationalities of the contributors. However, the use of racial terms was *de rigueur* at the time he was writing and Earle genuinely believed that the two great Anglo-Saxon powers—the United States and the British Empire (which contained, as he knew, many non-Anglo-Saxons)—were in an existential struggle against the ‘evils’ of totalitarianism, as represented by Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and militarist Japan.

It the book’s introduction Earle tells us that strategy ‘deals with war, preparation for war, and the waging of war’. No doubt influenced by Clausewitz’s definition, Earle informs us that ‘narrowly defined, it [strategy] is the art of military command, of projecting and directing a campaign.’ But strategy, he says, has expanded beyond the traditional and narrow definition; and as war becomes more complex, strategy must consider non-military factors: economic, psychological, moral, political, and technological. In this context, strategy does not exist just during wartime; it is, rather, ‘an inherent element of statecraft at all times.’ Earle thus defines strategy as ‘the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation – or a coalition of nations – including its armed forces, to the end that its vital interests shall be effectively promoted and secured against enemies, actual, potential, or merely presumed’. The highest form of strategy is grand strategy whose purpose – if it is to be effective -- is to ensure that resorting to war is unnecessary or if peace fails that it is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory. It is clear that Earle intended to introduce Americans to strategy, as that had never been their forte. Rather, their greatest achievements had been in the narrower, more technical arenas, such as tactics and military technology, not in thinking about the relationship between war

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19 Ibid., viii.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
and politics or ruminating on how to effectively integrate ends and goals with ways and means.  

*Makers of Modern Strategy* was phenomenally successful and became a ‘modern classic’ in the words of Princeton military historian, Peter Paret, in his introduction to the contemporary and much upgraded version of the book, *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age.*

Earle witnessed the birth of both the atomic and thermonuclear ages but unfortunately died of cancer in 1954, at the age of 60. The dropping of the atomic bomb was, of course, the seminal event that shaped the post–Second World War era. The atom bomb itself was a symbol of the close relationship that had emerged between the military and the scientific community; particularly reflected in the enormous research, production, and testing enterprise known as the ‘Manhattan Project’. The years between 1945 and 1954 witnessed the steady and almost inevitable rise of what came to be called the civilian strategic thinkers within the American national security establishment. However, it was still a discipline that was in search of itself.

**Strategic studies: An American ‘social science’**

Decades ago, the noted Franco-Austrian theorist, Stanley Hoffman, stated in a seminal article that international relations was an American social science.  

The same could equally be said of strategic studies whose single-minded focus after 1955 was the Cold War confrontation between the West and the Soviet bloc, and the problem of nuclear war. Twenty-five years ago, the noted Anglo-American strategic thinker, Colin Gray, wrote in *Strategic Studies and Public Policy* that the period between 1955 and 1965 was the ‘golden age’ of American strategic thought. Strategic studies was energized in that era, dominated as it was by the US’s all-consuming need to face and deal with its ideological enemy, the USSR. Initially, it was driven by the desire to achieve US nuclear supremacy but when that appeared unattainable, to ensure nuclear stability, and by the need to avoid nuclear war. Indeed, when we talk about Western dominance, it really was American dominance for a particular period. It was the era of Albert Wohlstetter, William Kaufman, Bernard Brodie, Herman Kahn, and of course, Thomas Schelling. What they had in common was a devotion to understanding the dangers of nuclear war.

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23 Ibid., ix.
24 In retrospect there are various criticism that can be made about the volume’s biases e.g. why start with Machiavelli? Why not include Thucydides, Belisarius, Sun Tzu or Kautilya?
tank to develop the effective and efficient strategy for the use of airpower and the atom bomb through rigorous quantitative analysis. RAND recognised, however, that many aspects of war required the tools of social sciences. However, RAND’s foray into the Third World in the 1960s using the social sciences proved less than fruitful. America’s involvement in Vietnam comes to mind.

No survey of American strategic studies can avoid the tragedy that was the Vietnam War. Civilian strategists and the institutions for whom they worked, such as RAND, became consumed by what the military and the national security community initially thought was a sideshow. The failings of strategic studies in regard to Vietnam were on two distinct levels: the first being North Vietnam, or the self-styled Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the second America’s mercurial and difficult ally, the Republic of Vietnam. With respect to the former, the key issue was how to defeat or rather coerce what a monumentally baffled Lyndon Baines Johnson referred to as a ‘bicycle-powered peasant economy’. How was it that a primitive state with a fraction of the military, economic and industrial power of its foe could withstand substantial punishment and continue to send significant numbers of well-trained infantry to fight the US and its ally in South Vietnam?

By way of contrast, why was ‘our ally,’ South Vietnam so ineffective at defending itself with our help? Why was the Army of the Republic of Vietnam so bad? None of the econometric, systems analysis or even qualitative models put out in large quantities could answer that question for American strategists and the policymakers they advised. Indeed, one could argue that the Vietnam War and the subsequent defeat contributed to the erosion of the golden age of US dominance in strategic studies.

**Strategic studies in the West outside the United States**

When strategic studies emerged in the rest of the Global North, it was in Britain, France, and Australia. In those early years the only Western military power apart from the US was Britain, which already had a strong historical tradition of studying wars thanks to officers and intellectuals before the Second World War such as Spenser Wilkinson, Basil Liddell Hart, and J.F.C. Fuller. In the aftermath of the Second World War, it developed a small but strong group of civilian strategists and a number of institutions dealing with strategy and war studies such as the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Outside of the English-speaking Western world, only France developed significant and robust strategic thought, and consequently strategic studies. To some extent, French strategic studies drew from the sociological origins of French international
relations and from the emerging ‘Anglo-Saxon’ school of strategic studies. However, the dominant philosophical foundations owed much more to Raymond Aron, whose inspirations, ironically, were two Germans: Max Weber and Carl von Clausewitz. Following the fiasco of the Algerian decolonisation war in the early 1960s, French leader, Charles De Gaulle, was determined to transform his country into a major military power; and nuclear weapons constituted an essential element of the quest for *la gloire*. In this context, despite considerable obstacles, France developed a cadre of strategic thinkers who put France on the map with respect to this field. Raymond Aron, Pierre Gallois, Andre Beaufre and Herve Coutau-Begarie may not be household names in the United States but their ideas and output in this field were significant.

Australian achievements in strategic studies must be highlighted as they have been tremendous. Outsiders underestimate the achievements in this field of those down under in the lucky country. However, on closer inspection it is not surprising that Australia became a powerhouse in strategic studies. Australian strategic studies are a product of the country’s strategic environment and of its intellectuals and policymakers near permanent obsession with that particular environment—a Western country located close to Asia—over the course of the past century. Despite being far away and located at a great distance from the centre of gravity of great power conflict, Australia was plugged in to what was happening around the world. Hugh White, one of Australia’s leading strategic thinkers and analysts, once wrote that Australia was born in ‘strategic sin.’ Its birth was a result of the effective use of military power by Britain during the Seven Years War between it and its formidable rival, France, a war which could rightly be referred to as the first world war because it was truly global in scope. In its early years, Australia existed in a state of ‘strategic innocence’ due to the protection afforded by Britain’s strength as a great power. Australia’s solid contributions in the First and Second World Wars endowed it not only with a first-rate military but with a keen awareness of geopolitics and the international

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29 Among the French strategic thinkers, only Raymond Aron has achieved the level of reverence that is reserved for the leading strategists of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ world. He was a towering intellectual, a polymath at ease with history, military history, Clausewitzian studies (he was a profound interpreter of Clausewitz), sociology, IR theories and of course strategic studies.
30 The story of Australia’s emergence as a power-house in strategic studies has been told many times. Paul Dibb, ‘Conclusion: What is the future of strategic studies,’ in Russell Glenn (ed.), New Directions in Strategic Thinking 2.0: ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre’s Golden Anniversary Conference Proceedings, (Canberra: ANU Press, 2018), 193-205.
system. Australia’s strong political and military ties firstly with Britain and then later with the United States ensured that, even when they vehemently disagreed with their two powerful allies, Australian policymakers and diplomats were vocal in articulating their country’s views. It is not surprising then that Australian academics also began to take a profound interest in emerging strategic issues, particularly after the Second World War.

Australian international relations scholars expended considerable political effort establishing Australia as a strategic studies centre, despite opposition from some academics, intellectuals, those on the left, and universities worried by both the research agenda of studying force and the forging of links too close to the United States, its giant strategic studies complex and sponsors. Australians speak and write in the lingua franca of strategic studies: English. This was a critical factor in the integration of Australians into the strategic community. Many Australians studied in Britain or the United States. Furthermore, Australia has proven welcoming to existing and in-training scholars from other countries, many of whom settled and made Australia’s strategic issues their own to study, even providing policy advice to their adopted country.

**Strategic studies in the Global South**

Now I come to what was formerly known, during the Cold War, as the Third World but is now more appropriately referred to as the Global South. There are two distinct issues to address. First, what existed in terms of strategic studies in the Global South. And second, what did Western strategic studies have to say about strategic issues in the Global South, which in a nutshell, was not much in the early decades. This issue became a pointed source of criticism, which will be discussed in a later section.

The answer to the first issue is that until very recently, strategic studies in the Third World was almost non-existent. Many Latin American countries – particularly those overwhelmingly dominated by an elite and population of European descent that had become independent in the 19th century had developed relatively robust militaries and were resolute in their desire to emulate aspects of the military culture, symbolism and norms of the more successful European armed forces such as France and Imperial Germany. In many Latin American countries, militaries intervened in political processes seeing themselves as mythic saviours, protectors of the existing order, or as instruments of modernisation and development, as long as it was under military direction or control. These countries had no strategic studies independent of

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32 The Global South is not made up of an undifferentiated group of countries. While they often share similar political and socioeconomic problems associated with underdevelopment and the pitfalls of rapid, skewed and uneven modernization, they are not all the same and their military capabilities varied.
their overwhelmingly politicised military establishments. Thereafter, when they faced internal dissension and violent left-wing guerrilla or urban terrorism movements, the focus of their militaries was to develop internal counterinsurgency and counterterrorism practices to combat revolutionary war and to develop concepts of ‘acceptable’ economic development and modernization.

In these ‘national security states’, as they were known in the comparative politics literature, the military dominated what passed for strategic studies. In those countries, the geopolitical ideas of Rudolf Kjellen and other geopolitical thinkers argued that the state was a living organism that must be protected. The Latin American militaries regarded themselves as the guardians of this living organism, which they believed must be saved from dangerous microbes: leftwing ideas and intellectuals. Civilian participation in this enterprise was frowned upon.

When the majority of the Global South became independent after the Second World War, they were, for the most part, military weaklings, with exceptions such as India that had developed enormous armed forces to fight on behalf of Britain. Most countries in the Global South did not have civilian strategic experts and their militaries, which in many cases ruled these newly independent nations, monopolised any strategic thought within their establishments; wider debate was not encouraged.

Over time, this situation began to change, particularly after the Cold War ended, as many Global South countries had by then emerged as military powers in their own right. Many of their best and brightest had trained as international relations and strategic studies scholars in the West, which encouraged the development of strategic studies in the Global South. But, there was an irony: the training of Global South students in the Global North initially meant the transmission of western strategic studies discourses and practices to the Global South.

Political scientist Mohammad Ayoob and others have pointed out in various publications that the Western approach to strategic studies was largely inapplicable to the security problems of the Global South. However, with the emergence of the second and third generations of Global South strategic scholars, we might finally see strategic studies and strategic practice in line with the realities of Global South security environments.

The critiques of strategic studies

Since its inception in the 1950s, strategic studies has been subjected to a wide-ranging set of criticisms. Each time its advocates have succeeded in fending off these criticisms, some have been withering assaults, while others have highlighted deficiencies that could not be ignored and need to be addressed.

Early critiques of strategic studies

In the early decades of strategic studies, many individuals took the discipline to task for a wide range of sins. Some declared that strategic studies was immoral because it was not concerned with the ethical and moral problems posed by the emergence of nuclear weapons; rather its members discussed how to wage war under these new conditions. It was accused of being a pseudo-science because of its creation of theories and concepts that had no bearing on the real world. Civilian strategists were derided as being not academics but mercenaries, providing advice to their respective governments and military institutions on how to effectively and efficiently practice that social evil: war.35 Civilian strategists were known as civilian ‘militarists’ or as ‘crack-pot’ realists in the immortal words of C. Wright Mills.36

What many of the critics ignored was the fact that the civilian strategists were trying their best to ensure escalation to full-scale war was avoided in the nuclear age, particularly following the invention of the hydrogen bomb. In any event, these critiques were met head-on and addressed by a number of people in the field of strategic studies, including Hedley Bull, who was one of Australia’s leading international relations theorists and a keen strategic thinker.37

Western strategic studies and the Third World/Global South

Early strategic studies as practiced in the West virtually ignored the military problématique of the Third World, or what we now call the Global South. This is not to say that the threat of force or its actual use among and within states in that vast region did not occur. On the contrary, it did occur, with depressing regularity. The exercise of force was a constant feature of the Third World security environment.

So why did Western strategic studies not study the conflicts and wars of the Third World? Firstly, Western strategic scholars were preoccupied with the nuclear confrontation between the superpowers and making sure it would not end in the extermination of humanity. Whatever conflict happened among the lesser nations was

37 Hedley Bull, ‘Strategic Studies and Its Critics,’ World Politics, Vol.20, No.4 (July 1968), 593-605.
seen either as an extension of Cold War dynamics or as the exertion of puny military power of little significance. To be sure, some conflicts and wars apart from the US–Vietnam entanglement caught the attention of some observers, namely, the Arab–Israeli, Sino–Indian, and Indo–Pakistani conflicts and wars. But those interested were few and far between.

For many years, Western strategic studies of the Third World suffered from a paucity of information due to a lack of regional and language experts. In the early 1990s, eminent American strategic thinker, Eliot Cohen, wrote a piece about wars in what was still referred to as the Third World; he called them distant wars and began by pointing out that our knowledge of wars in the Third World was imprecise because records were few and data hard to come by.

Area and regional studies had taken-off in the 1960s within the remit of Comparative Politics and studies of civil-military relations in the Third World abounded. But, studies of the exercise of force and military power in the Third World did not. One also must not forget that in the early decades of strategic studies’ emergence, Third World military power was less significant and often when it was exercised it did not impress. Arab performance was not worthy of consideration, except for the October 1973 War, and then only to those interested in drawing lessons from its tactics, techniques and procedures. The Iran-Iraq War was referred to as the clash of the inept versus the incompetent, due to the dismal and inefficient use of military power by both belligerents, and not surprisingly, little interest was shown until very recently.

The attitude of the West to conflicts in the Third World is reminiscent to the famous response of Helmut von Moltke the Elder’s to a military journalist asking his opinions on the American Civil War: ‘I am not interested in the clash of mobs in the wilderness.’ Many in the West saw wars in the Third World as nothing but amateurish approximations of what we do. This attitude has changed in recent years, and analyses of the exercise of military power by states in the Third World is now being addressed by a growing number of strategic analysts in the West.

The ‘relevance’ of strategic studies

The post–Cold War era has seen a new angle of attack leveled against strategic studies: its relevance. Over a quarter of a century ago, the well-known strategist and international relations theorist, Richard Betts, noted in a seminal article—provocatively titled, ‘Should Strategic Studies Survive?’—that the spectre haunting strategic studies was the spectre of peace. Of course, peace did not break out with the end


of the Cold War and we continue to been subjected to the spectacle of nasty little wars around the globe. However, Betts’ comments highlighted the bias of strategic studies at the time on wars between the great powers fought by people who look like us, presumably Westerners. He was not sure that strategic studies would be eclipsed by peace breaking out; and he was right to suggest that the abeyance of great power war, or threat of war, might not be a permanent condition. Sure enough, we are once again seeing intensified great power competition and that as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century war is not implausible.

In 1993, Betts could not have known that these nasty little wars in faraway places of which nobody had previously heard would come to centre-stage at the turn of the twenty-first century. Many would agree that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been costly, of questionable importance and have demonstrated a mismatch between policy goals and military means. Moreover, they have occupied the energies and resources of many in the strategic studies arena, either academically or even in active involvement on the ground. But to what end?

**Conclusion**

Strategic studies is a sub-discipline whose relevance and achievements have been the subject of contention for decades. Every now and then, because of its ill-defined frontiers, questions of what is strategic studies and is it relevant are raised. How do you define it and demarcate it from other similar fields? Has it effectively dealt with the numerous criticisms it has been subjected to since its emergence in the 1950s? These are questions that strategic studies, a field of which I have been a card-carrying member for the entirety of my career, has struggled with since its inception.

But, strategic studies is not on the cusp of irrelevance. To the chagrin of many, it refuses to die the ignominious death its numerous critics seemingly think it deserves. Every few years, those in the field of strategic studies engage in some extensive soul-searching about their area of study or find that they have to defend it, yet again, from the verbal assaults of its critics.40

As long as human beings continue to think about or actually use force in their relationships with one another, the future of strategic studies is assured. Those of us in the field can certainly learn from the achievements and failures of our predecessors. However, as was once said: The past is a distant country. We must resolutely focus on the present and the future. It is, of course, a cliché, but the present global strategic environment is characterised by considerable uncertainties and dangers.

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For Australia, these uncertainties and dangers will require clarity of thinking concerning the country’s national security, threat perceptions, and defence planning. This is where strategic scholars in the country can make a difference. It is hoped that this journal will be a safe home for productive debate on a wide range of strategic studies challenges impacting Australia in the coming years.