

War theory

War

War belongs to the province of social life. Insofar as it is a social act, it presupposes the conflicting wills of politically organized collectivities. We could compare it with business competition, which is also a conflict of human interests. However, war is a conflict of great interests settled by bloodshed, and only in that is it different from other types of conflict. It is the continuation of political commerce by other means.

Therefore, war is the product of organized violence carried on by political units against each other. Violence is not war unless it is carried out in the name of a political unit and is directed against another political unit. War is not a single act in that it is not isolated from the actor's political actions and objectives. Instead, it manifests political relations in another dimension, using a different set of means.

War is a political action; it rises from a political situation and results from a political motive. It is an act of organized violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will. War is the means, whereas the compulsory submission of the enemy to our preference is the ultimate object. Thus, war is not an end in itself but a real political instrument through which states can achieve their goals in the international system. Hence, it is a calculated and conscious use of organized violence aiming at the political entity's defence and survival and the security of its interests in the international system.

Democratic peace theory

The democratic peace theory has its roots in the liberalist and neoliberalist paradigms and holds that democracies do not fight other democracies. It is usually backed up by historical evidence found in modern history. In fact, the theory's central idea can be traced back to Kant's Perpetual Peace. The belief that democracies constitute a zone of peace rests on a perceived high correlation between governmental form and international outcome. Therefore, its supporters suggest that intentional uniformity (all states becoming liberal democratic) can cause international peace. As a result, democracies are justified in fighting non-democracies because, in this way, they contribute to the preservation of peace.

The democratic peace theory is being based on the above arguments: 1) Democratic states act morally, since societies are fair to each other (and in this case, societies have the power), and show mutual understanding; 2) the democratic culture of consent in internal politics is being externalized in international relations; 3) the decision making procedures are transparent, and thus it is challenging for an actor to initiate a surprise attack; 4) war is prevented because it implies political cost to a democratically elected government and 5) democratic countries do not need war, like authoritarian regimes do, as a distraction of the people from the internal political situation.

Nevertheless, the democratic peace theory has been criticized a lot. Its most profound critics are the following: 1) the correlation of the variables is not proven, and many suggest their inversion, that is, war becoming the independent variable and democracy the dependent. In other words, it is the absence of an external threat that provides the conditions for the existence and growth of democracies and not the opposite; 2) even if all states became democratic; the system would remain anarchic and thus war-prone; 3) the public opinion's view regarding which states can be considered entirely democratic is being based on substantial interest. An objective classification of the above is complicated anyway. A liberal democracy at war with another country is unlikely to call it a liberal democracy.

Hegemonic war

Hegemonic war can be defined as the kind of war that puts at stake the international system and threatens to transform its structure. There are two types of hegemonic war.

First, when the actor/s that already have a hegemonic position in the system initiate a war against a potential antagonist (state or coalition), whose power causes them to fear for their security and their primary and beneficial position in the system. In other words, they try not to allow another state climb to their own level of relative power, thus maintaining the advantageous status quo.

Second, when a revisionist actor or coalition initiate a war in order to catch up with the level of the other great powers and alter the status quo in his/their own interest.

Both cases can also start as a normal war and end up as a hegemonic one due to the fact that 1) the normal war winner scares all the other powers and 2) the normal war winner grabs the chance to better secure his interests through the continuation of organized violence against other powers.

Revolutionary war

Revolutionary war is the evolution of a hegemonic war and refers to the extreme revisionism of a state (or coalition) that uses the process of war as a tool for the complete restructuring of the international system and the establishment of itself into a dominus solus.

The above is not a rational choice for those who have not enough power to achieve it. In other words, the goals surpass the available means.

Due to the unlimited nature of the state's goal, the power it needs to use is also unlimited, which results to the state being irrational and the war losing its politician nature. That is because war is no longer a tool in the name of the state's political ends but war happens for the sake of war and the state becomes just a tool in that process.

Preemptive war

Preemptive war is the begging of a war initiative against the proven will of the adversary to resort to the use of violence before he launches the first blow himself.

It has to do with destroying a potential and direct threat (within weeks, days or hours) before it is materialised.

Let's assume that state B is at the final stage of its military mobilisation to strike state A soon. State A has perceived the immediacy of the threat and chooses to strike first to gain the military initiative of the first blow and, therefore, to avoid a generalised war.

When we get to a preemptive war scenario, the avoidance of the war and the non-use of violence have already been excluded, and deterrence has failed. Hence, we are leading to a sure confrontation.

Illustrative example: Six-Day War

Preventive war

Preventive war has to do with destroying a potential and long-term threat before it is materialised. It aims to weaken the pillars of power of the adversary using organised violence and forcefully halt his empowerment in the international system.

It is grounded on the principle that the percentage of violence that needs to be used to weaken the adversary is relatively less than that necessary to face him when he has arrived at a higher level of empowerment.

Let's assume that state A realises that its deterrence efforts against state B do not have the preferred outcome. B continues to empower itself, resulting in increasing A's security dilemma. A decides to attack B to forcibly stop its strengthening procedure in the long run

State A has diagnosed that its balance of power with state B will develop against it over time. It considers B a potential enemy- regardless of B's intentions- and strikes while the balance of power is still relatively favourable.

Illustrative example: Peloponnesian War

War friction

According to Clausewitz' approach, friction refers to the below-mentioned data that influence the conduct of one war: Uncertainty, mistakes, accidents, technical difficulties, unpredictable elements and the results of all these upon the decisions, moral, and actions of the whole army during the war.

Due to friction, in war, an action always varies partly or holly from the plans. Friction is more influential where the war action in its total cannot be concentrated in a single and principal operation without interruption, but it has to break down into individual actions/steps.

Through the concept of friction, Clausewitz proves that war and its result cannot be analysed in the same way as a mathematical problem. Therefore, its outcome cannot be predicted before its start based on the power correlation of the warring parties.

Logistics of war

Clausewitz suggests that the art of war is the art of using all the available means in the battle. Making a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon of war, he includes in it all the actions that take place for the sake of the war, like the creation of the military forces, the concentration of the army, its equipment, its supplies, and its training.

Henceforth, logistics, in military science, all the activities of armed-force units in roles supporting combat units, including transport, supply, signal communication, medical aid, and the like.

Logistics of war refer to the conduct of a war, its preparation and its maintaining.

The action of war includes all the activities that serve it, which are differentiated from it per se and are associated with the maintenance of the armed forces. Therefore, the concept of war involves both the war itself and all the parallel actions that the state is performing to conduct the war.

The more organised the logistics are, the more probable is a victorious outcome of the war. Moreover, effective logistics are reducing friction and its effects.

Sources:

Carl von Clausewitz: On War (edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 1989)

Raymond Aron (1966) Peace & War

Hedley Bull (1977) The Anarchical Society

Ilias Kouskouvelis (2004) Εισαγωγή στις Διεθνείς Σχέσεις

Spyros Litsas (2010) Πόλεμος και Ορθολογισμός

Spyros Litsas lectures: War Theory (University of Macedonia)

Robert Gilpin (1988) The theory of Hegemonic War

Koliopoulos Konstantinos (2008): Η Στρατηγική Σκέψη από την Αρχαιότητα έως Σήμερα

Panagiotis Kondylis (1998) Θεωρία Πολέμου/Theorie des Krieges

Georgios Spyropoulos (2010) Διεθνείς Σχέσεις

Kenneth N. Waltz (2000) Structural Realism after the Cold War

Martin Wight (1991) International Theory: The Three Traditions

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/204816.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A43cddffadec24b43d899568475b89d5>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/logistics-military>

IR101 NEWS TEAM