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War and Conflict: A Concise Definition

Based on what I have learned on how to define, measure, and track war over time, I believe that war is not going out of style. War is sustained coordinated violence between political organizations. This particular definition of war allowed us to measure the concept of war over time using four components, three of which are explicit and one is implicit. The first one, *coordinated political violence*, is explicit. *Coordinated political violence* means that war is a conflict involving armed forces that operate and coordinate under one major command structure, like official armies of states. These command structures are responsible for the actions and conducts of the subordinates it encompasses. Command structures also have the ability to execute concerted military operations. The second component is called *sustained violence*. Scholars who study war placed a threshold of violence that they can use to categorize if a conflict is indeed a war. Conflicts that cross this set threshold of violence, which involves a minimum count of one-thousand battle related deaths in a twelve-month time frame, can be called a “war”. The third explicit component of war is that the violence should be reciprocal. The conflict should have mutual military action in order to qualify as a war. The notion that a war should be *purposive* is the last, and only implicit, component of war. This last component involves a behavioral understanding of war. It bases itself on the behavior of two or more political organizations.

Using the four components of war, one can classify and track a war over time. There are four ways to categorize war: intrastate (within the state), interstate (across national borders),

extrastate (state fighting against a non-state entity), and non-state (conflict between non-state actors that crosses national borders). Between the years of 1816 to 2007, there were 95 interstate wars, 334 intrastate wars, 163 extrastate wars, and 62 non-state wars. The categorization of great power wars is based on terms of power status of the actors involved. Since the turn of the sixteenth century, there had been 63 great power wars. A world war is an extreme degree of war that involves at least five great powers and military operations on at least two continents. There had been eight world wars since 1648.

The main categorizations of war and the four components that comprise it tabulate a historical trend of war that has three upward trends, three constant trends, and three downward trends. The historical trend of war in the past three hundred to five hundred years suggests that war is not going out of style. The first trend is a relatively constant incidence of war generally over the past two-hundred years. The second trend applies specifically to interstate wars, where it says that it also has a relatively constant incidence of war over the past two-hundred years. In terms of world war, in the past three-hundred sixty years, the trend shows it is also a relatively constant incident. The amount of great power wars in the last five-hundred years, though, showed a decline in trend. Incidences of intrastate wars increased over the past two-hundred years, especially on the last sixty years. This rise in intrastate wars also increased the amount of internationalized intrastate wars on the same time frame of two-hundred years. Extrastate and non-state wars both decreased in the past one-hundred and one-hundred fifty years, respectively. The last trend indicates that the military might of states increased in the past two-hundred years.

The argument that war is going out of style was proposed by Steven Pinker, when he said that because of “pacification, civilization, and the humanitarian revolution” states prefer to not go to war, and thus, there was a decline in conflict in war. The strongest piece of evidence for

scholars who agree that war is going out of style is the period of “Long Peace” that followed World War II. They regard both World War I and II, like Napoleonic Wars, as “anomalies” and exceptions to the rule because both were started by individual people, like Napoleon, Gavrilo Princip, and Adolf Hitler (Braumoller 3). Even though both World Wars were sparked by lone individuals, the circumstances and social climate at the time they instigated wars was fertile for war. The weak Treaty of Versailles and the unfairness of the German reparation terms set the stage for another subsequent World War. When the allies were conducting the Treaty of Versailles and writing the terms of the German reparation, they knew fully well that there is a huge chance of backlash against it (Braumoller 3).

Another major argument against Pinker’s statement that war is going out of style is the fact that it establishes itself entirely on the premise that the occurrence of war is attributed to chance. Peace can also be attributed to chance in the same manner. An incidence of the Cuban Missile Crisis is an example of peace due to chance. The United States stated its plan to “use practice depth charges” to compel the Soviet submarines to reveal themselves. The Soviets failed to inform their four submarines about it. The Soviets also failed to reveal the fact that their submarines were armed with nuclear-tipped torpedoes. The soviet submarines almost fired nuclear weapons on the US navy, but because of chances of failing to convey and misunderstandings, peace happened.

Wars did not go obsolete, they evolved. They adapted and changed to fit in the present climate of human civilization. Because of this, the definition should be adjusted as well to fit the present parameters of war. The last archetype of war happened during the Iraq invasion in 2003. The 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia did not qualify to be a war because it only happened for five days and the non-continuous nature of skirmished between North and South

Korea also fails to qualify as a war because it is sporadic and non-continuous. The ninth historical trend of war explains that there is also an increase in the military might of states, which means that they stayed in their armed position. This can lead to a security dilemma between states, and can therefore lead to a potential war.

Works Cited

Braumoller, Bear. "Is War Disappearing?" *Department of Political Science, Ohio State University* (2013): 1-28. 27 August 2013. Web. 04 March 2015.