

WHAT IS NEW IN NEW WARS?

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

WHAT IS NEW IN NEW WARS?

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ABSTRACT

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The security challenges of today have made western liberal democracies go to war four times during the last twenty years. The same countries have been, and still are, participating in a variety of peace keeping, peace enforcing and stability operations globally. The ability to use force as a political tool is important and needed in order to create security to many people in our world. But this ability is challenged. During the last twenty years we have experienced the limitations and consequences of our use of violence. In the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan we have identified shortfalls and failures. In Africa, human suffering and violence have been left unattended. Some scholars and practitioners have argued that the old classical theory on war is obsolete, and that we need new theories in order to deal properly with these “new wars”. This paper will analyze three important dimensions connected to the classical theory on war in relation to “new wars”. The aim of the analysis is to search for a more comprehensive understanding of possibilities, challenges and limitations connected to war as a political tool today.

WHAT IS NEW IN NEW WARS?

War appears to be as old as mankind, but peace is a modern invention.

-Sir Henry Maine (1822-88)

Introduction

These are the words of Sir Henry Maine written more than 150 years ago, and based on what we know today; there is little evidence that he was wrong.¹ Evil does exist in this world, and force may sometimes be necessary due to the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.² But several practitioners and theorists of war have for the last two decades indicated a need for change in the theoretical and practical ways we are dealing with war as a human endeavor. Some argue that wars have been privatized by warlords and mercenaries, and that states no longer have monopoly of war.³ The system of legitimate violence has broken apart.⁴ Others suggest that the whole paradigm connected to war needs to change.⁵ Can these shortfalls and failures be connected to our theoretical framework on war? And do these challenges really imply the need to change the paradigm of war?

The aim of this paper is to investigate limitations and possibilities connected to war as a human endeavor in order to illuminate what is new in the “New Wars”. Three important dimensions, passion, reason and chance, extracted from an old and still used paradigm of war will be compared and contrasted against contemporary realities of war. The aim of the analysis is to search for a more comprehensive understanding of possibilities, challenges and limitations connected to war as a political tool in our contemporary world. War is in its core a highly practical endeavor where physical and moral strength are challenging each other in time and space. Why is theory on this ultimate human challenge in the physical and psychological domain so important?

The starting point for this analysis is a short visit into the importance of theory, and a summary of classical theory on war.

Why study theory on war.

Theory can be described as a set of reasoned ideas intended to explain facts and events.⁶ Because military theory explicitly and implicitly informs both practitioners and politicians who must carry out tasks of vital importance to the society, it must be based on verifiable knowledge. It must be organized as a corpus of interrelated, mutually supporting concepts and principles. If not it will be a series of random thoughts with an accuracy in line with a random coin toss.⁷ Through theories we can develop a comprehensive and relevant understanding of the complexity connected to war. But the theories have to be comprehensive for three reasons: First, war is more than armament, logistics, drill and deployment of force. Second, war is more than a natural function of man where he performs as well as his aptitude permits. And third, no theory can be of any value if it only searches for fixed formulations ignoring the important interconnecting elements of uncertainty, the importance of moral factors and the unpredictable reactions of the adversary.⁸ War is so dangerous that one who has not taken part in it can conceive what it is like. In war the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from what is normal in academic speculation.⁹ If war is the realm of uncertainty and chance, it is certainly also the realm of suffering, confusion, exhaustion and fear, or friction as Clausewitz described the environment in which all military action took place.¹⁰

Clausewitz and his classical theory of war

For the purpose of the comparison and before dealing with the characteristics of new wars, it is appropriate to briefly summarize classical war theory. Many theorists and practitioners have studied war. Plato, Thucydides, Sun Tzu, Jomini and Tikhachevsky,

to mention some, have all contributed to a better understanding of war as a human phenomenon. Carl von Clausewitz has perhaps delivered the most used and discussed theory on war in his work *On War*. His trinity provides the best organizing framework for discussing characteristics of the new wars. That is why his theory provides the basis for this analysis.

War is an act of force to compel your enemy to do your will and it has to be seen as the continuation of policy with other means.¹¹ It is never an autonomous act, but always an instrument of policy.¹² War is about individuals and their societies. On the individual level war reaches into the most secret places in the human being. Places where self dissolves rational purpose, where pride reigns, where emotions are paramount and where instinct is king.¹³ War is also a place where we are prevented from making a justified statement by our feelings, which themselves act as a higher judgment.¹⁴ War is about, duty, honor, country, courage, self sacrifice and victory; about failure, fog and cowardice. But war is also about the loser and the often forgotten plan on how to win the peace. War has come to be associated with the existence of societies or states, of state interests and of rational and irrational calculation on how they may be achieved.¹⁵ War is based on the assumption that it may lead to a positive or prevent a negative political end for the states involved. Positive ends include such things as gaining freedom, more territory, more resources, reducing potential or real threats from neighboring states. Negative ends may involve losing freedom, giving up territory, influence and resources. If the incentive for war grows on one side, it diminishes on the other.¹⁶

War has a physical dimension. Physical force is the means of war to impose the will on the enemy.¹⁷ But inner strength also matters very much in war and is extremely difficult to describe in terms of measurable elements. The outcome of war is often dependant moral force, a force that can only be perceived by the inner eye which differs in each person; and is also different in the same person at different times.¹⁸ Out of moral and values grows courage and self sacrifice, important characteristics which give life to military effect. War is about the interplay between the use of military force and moral forces and the two cannot be separated.¹⁹ War is by nature a very complicated political instrument because it exposes the participants to an endless number of physical and psychological factors making the simplest thing difficult.²⁰ It is a true duel between two wills fought on different political arenas, hampered by fog and friction, reinforced by chance and moral values where the military component is the *ultimo ratio*, the last political argument of the state in its effort to achieve a politically important goal greater than the means required to obtain it. It must never become a purely military issue, and subordinating the political point of view to the military is absurd, because it is policy that creates war.²¹

War comes in a variety of manifestations and labels. Total war and limited war, linear war and asymmetrical war, revolutionary war, civil war, industrial war, liberation war, nuclear war, guerrilla war, war on terror and humanitarian war, old wars and new wars just to mention some. War is more than a true chameleon that adapts its characteristics to the given case and can appear in different ways depending on time, actors and purpose.²²

Success in war relies on balance in a paradoxical trinity composed of passion, reason and chance which are associated with the people (1), the military and its commanders (2) and the government (3).²³ Every part in this trinity relates to each other, and none of them can be left out of the equation. In a democracy, the people provide the moral and legal legitimacy to the government. By paying taxes, the people also provide the means and the fighting force necessary to establish a functioning government with a military capability. In countries with conscription, the people even provide the fighting force. The government determines the political aims based on the social contract it has with the people. To those aims the government connects resources necessary to pursue its political goals, including military capacities. The connection between the elements of the above mentioned trinity and their effects on each other regarding military capability can be envisaged in the following equation:

$$\text{Military capability} = \text{Will (people/government)} \times \text{Ways (strategy, military/government)} \times \text{Means (military/government)}^{24}$$

The intention behind this equation is not to determine exact values measuring a states military capability, but to indicate the interconnectivity between will ways and means or expressed in Clausewitz' terms passion, reason and chance. For the purpose of this analysis it is merely enough to determine if one of the factors tends towards zero. If that is the case, the result of the equation will be zero, indicating lack of military capability for a war. A comprehensive strategy of war must ensure the balance in the Clausewitzian trinity, and is a prerequisite for success according to Clausewitz' classical theory on war.

War in today's world and in Clausewitz' time, is generally regarded as a political tool belonging to states. The state system has since the treaty of Westphalia in 1648

gradually become universal, and together with it also the paradigm of war. War is in many ways an enormously demanding effort, not only in human suffering, but also in material and economical costs to those states involved. In order to preserve peace, the United Nations (UN) was established after World War II as the international security tool created to prevent the world from again embarking upon the devastating enterprise of global war.²⁵

The UN was constructed to deal with disputes and conflicts between states in order to prevent war by initially using preventive diplomacy, but also by deploying peacekeeping forces in order to stabilize the situation, and make the international environment more favorable to continued diplomatic efforts.²⁶ Its ability to succeed relies upon the ability to provide the necessary agreement between the disputing states and also between the members of the Security Council, especially the five great powers, China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States of America. This ability has since the beginning of the UN constantly been challenged, and the UN has since the 1990s had a mixed peacekeeping record.²⁷ The UN remains an assembly of 192 sovereign states trying through diplomacy to find a common denominator for dealing with international problems while protecting members' national interests. Yet it also represents a central point for focusing on issues of security, international development, humanitarian assistance, environmental degradation, drugs, transnational crime, health and diseases, and common global issues that require international collaboration.²⁸

Our common ability to solve contemporary security problems between and inside nation states through the UN may have something to do with the theoretical framework we use when dealing with war, and the paradigm of war. We may be using a theory on

war that is no longer relevant, and by doing so leaving the UN and its member nations helplessly ineffective and incapable of dealing with contemporary security challenges. Because of these challenges several practitioners and theorists of war for the last two decades have indicated a need for change in the theoretical and practical ways we are dealing with war, a change from old to new wars. So what is new in the “New Wars”?

Reason – the politicians

The idea of a society as a single entity within a state is changing. Multiculturalists and a variety of single cause activists claim that society is made up of individual communities with their own identities and needs. With the rise in public welfare and material standard of living, the function of politics has changed. Rising income levels combined with the shift from values of survival to well being have brought about a decline in those great ideological positions which used to determine the high ground of political life.²⁹ The old economically based ideologies of left and right no longer carry the message they once did. According to Christopher Coker, the principal change is the disappearance of socialism and conservatism. The labels are still used by political parties or their opponents, but their policies no longer embrace the classical values of conservatives and socialists.

The New Right has challenged the competency and efficiency in all parts of the nineteenth-century model public services under government supervision, wanting every institution, including the military, to be responsible for its own future. The socialists, who used to call for equality through government intervention, have turned into the New Left, promising people autonomy and the right to an individual choice in a pluralistic society. Modern political thinking makes the idea of the society as a single entity no longer fashionable.³⁰

Politics is not any longer about the redistribution of benefits, but rather the distribution of costs. Politics has become a way of mitigating the different claims from individuals, groups, and fractions promoting their own special interests and needs. Combined with declining respect for authority and rise in autonomy, the political challenge now is to define the conditions of the social contract between the government and the governed.³¹ The overarching role of the politicians as security providers is no longer dominant. The difference between feeling secure and insecure is vitally important according to the American sociologist Ronald Inglehart, because it has led to a shift from “survival” values to “well-being” values. In Western societies we tend to take our national security for granted, and we are instead searching better quality of life.³² This new world outlook, he argues, is replacing the outlook that once dominated the societies in the industrial world. There is a growing emphasis on the subjective well-being and quality of life. Security is no longer automatically associated with what is best for the society, but rather if it is compatible with the interests of individuals and groups within the society or across societies.³³

This modern way of dealing with interests and values has already had an impact on attitudes to war and peace. In a world centered on individual needs, demands and values, war has become a disorientating experience, especially when we are dealing with contingencies in the Third World. Putting more emphasis on individual rights than on collective responsibility has an adversely impact on the operational effectiveness of a military force. War is not decisive anymore because its costs do not match its gains. The problem may be, as Kalevi Holsti frames it, that the Clausewitzian image of war as

well as its theoretical framework has become increasingly divorced from the characteristics and sources of most armed conflicts after 1945.³⁴

The Clausewitzian concept of war as organized combat between military forces of two or more states fits our mental maps because it is the predominant form of war characteristic of modern Western civilizations up until 1945. This is the model of war that has formed the Charter of the United Nations, collective defense organizations like NATO, the definitions of war and aggression in international law and Western military doctrines.³⁵ Since most wars since 1945 have been within states³⁶, what intellectual and political relevance have concepts and practices derived from experiences coming from war between states?³⁷

The assumption that the problem of war is primarily a problem of the relations between states has to be seriously questioned according to Holsti. He argues that security between states in the Third World primarily, is increasingly dependent upon security within those states.³⁸ Insecurity is essentially a problem of domestic politics, and the source of the problem is found in the nature of the new states. The processes of state forming in Europe and in the Americas took hundreds of years and were attended by wars, revolutions, rebellions, and massacres.³⁹ This process was not based on ideology, but on the nature of community. The community reflected not only different forms of military power, religion and culture, but also different concepts of identity based on religion, trade, clans and tribes. Our contemporary challenge is that in many areas of the world, the state is not the same as the community, and as long as many communities have adopted statehood as the ultimate political format, states based on other principles lack legitimacy.⁴⁰

More fundamental than the clash of civilizations based on ideologies, is the clash over different conceptions of community and how those conceptions should be reflected in political arrangements. Wars within and between communities are not the same as wars between states. Since the latter have been institutionalized in our concept of war, that is why we think of advanced weaponry, uniforms, chain of command, campaigns, laws of war and peace treaties when we think of war. Few of these are relevant to wars about communities and states, because these wars tend not to be institutionalized. They are not declared, no single crisis precipitates them, they have no clear starting date, decisive battles are few, and attrition, terror psychology and actions against civilians highlight “combat”. Rather than highly organized disciplined armed forces based on a strict command structure, wars are fought by loosely knit groups of regulars, irregulars, cells, and quite often by locally based warlords under little or no central authority. Because there seems to be no clear objective, these wars tend to last for decades.⁴¹ This is another war in contrast to our Western theory on war based on a clearly articulated purpose, defined sequences from beginning to end, maneuver and economy of force, decisive battles and a rigid command structure, regulated use of violence and protection of civilians.⁴²

Contrary to this view, others argue that these wars are not so different from “old wars”. When the objective is self enrichment as Mats Berdal suggests, there is a classical objective behind the war, although it is pursued by sub-state actors either from within or from abroad. Neither of them supports the idea of community, society or state welfare before self, and they are willing to fight for prolonged period of time, hence the seemingly endless war.⁴³

No one in his senses starts a war wrote Clausewitz, without first being clear in his mind what he wants to achieve by war and how it is intended to be conducted.⁴⁴

Clausewitz accepted that the passions of the peoples and the strategic calculations of the military were likely to play at least as important a role in the conduct of war as the rationality of governments. When Clausewitz wrote his theory, there was little problem with the purpose of the war and the rationality of the governments. But this kind of war is not necessarily the same as war fought to preserve or establish a community or a sense of identity.⁴⁵ Wars of unification, national liberation, and secession are wars with the objective to create a state. For a variety of reasons, ordinary cost-benefit analyses that underlie wars as a continuation of policy with other means no longer apply.⁴⁶ No government pursuing more traditional interests can possibly mobilize a whole society to conduct a people's war for thirty or more years with the human sacrifices and economic costs implied, according to Holsti. No government can win a people's war operating under the Clausewitzian calculus. Based on the recently learned lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan Holsti might have it right. There may be disconnect between war as a state endeavor and war as a community endeavor as Holsti suggests, because the ends for which we are fighting wars have changed.⁴⁷ This disconnect may be reinforced by the changed role of the state from a safety provider to a well being provider as both Ingelhart and Coker suggest.⁴⁸ But is this disconnect imposed on us by the "new wars" or is it a result of the social development in our community or part of the world? Has this change affected the two other parts of the Clausewitzian trinity?

Chance – the military

One of the defining features of the modern society at least since the French Revolution was the citizen soldier. The military was a national service regarded as a

privilege not a burden because it embodied the three principles from the French revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity.⁴⁹ The soldiers were conscripted to fight so that the society and the military was one. With the professionalization of the Western military forces this has changed. Some are talking about a growing rift between the military and the society. Many soldiers find themselves at odds with a society in which there seems to be little trace of the traditional values that officers still try to inculcate in the ranks. They feel they are members of a counter-culture in their attachment to a system that still honors courage, heroism, mission before self and honor itself.⁵⁰ Military culture is challenged from the ruling civilian ethos of self before state and from without, and by increasing civilianization of military functions based on civilian business models from within.⁵¹

As long as the West faces no clearly defined external threat to its security, other factors than military effectiveness will assume greater importance, particularly with regards to force structure.⁵² One may argue that the post modern society has undermined the Clausewitzian understanding of the relationship between state, people and army by its changing values. Soldiers are told that they have to be different from the society they come from. They are not like civilian employees because the success of military operations requires the subordination of individual rights to that of the mission and the team. But they also need the reassurance that in bearing arms for their country, the nation will look after them, and that is unlikely to be the case if they override civilian norms and values.⁵³

The military is now not only to share the values of the civil society, but even in the way it prosecutes war it is expected to reflect civility and compassion, in a word

humanitarianism.⁵⁴ Democratic governments using its military forces to fight wars for non-existential objectives are uncertain of the support from the society which is a must to both military and politicians in order to keep the Clausewitzian trinity in balance. The extent of uncertainty can be measured in the risk and casualty aversion among political leaders and their military subordinates.⁵⁵ The political reluctance for fighting wars that are not existential and the risk avoidance connected to it may not only be a way of gaining or maintaining popular support, but also a result of professionalization and civilization of the armed services as mentioned above.

The military forces of the West have to compete with other professions, commerce and industry for their share of talent and manpower. In order to pay competitively and to have money left for equipment and training, the units are getting smaller and fewer. Wasting the lives of these expensive specialists in a distant conflict without a clear end-state and against a non existential threat to the society providing the soldier is bad economics and bad logic.⁵⁶ To mitigate this effect politicians and military commanders use force protection. Force protection provides rules on what you can do, how you can do tactics, maneuver and movement, and how you are dressed and equipped when doing it. Force protection is imposing specific operational, tactical and technical limitations on a force out of political reasons, basically because the end is of minor importance. It is not up to the commander on the spot to decide the appropriate force posture, tactics and techniques. Those issues are directed from far away and it rapidly becomes the most important task. A military force is by nature capable of dealing with risk,

because risk is a natural element in war subordinated to chance, and can normally be dealt with appropriately. Normally it is mitigated through superior situational awareness, engaged, bold and imaginative leadership, rapid and flexible maneuver, accurate and timely fires, and capable, adaptable and offensive logistical systems. All components in numbers and with capacities dimensioned to meet uncertainty, not the minimum one could afford that day. It indicates a possible disconnect between the ideal military force required to meet a traditional war, and the available military assets used in contemporary wars globally.

Western military forces are mainly constructed for old wars. Due to fiscal requirements some states no longer have military forces capable of meeting the challenges of old wars. Neither have they developed new tools for contemporary wars. Following from the basic flaws in the structure of our forces, on each new occasion, new uses are found for old weapons and organizations, according to Rupert Smith.⁵⁷ The enemy is an adaptive human being, and opponents have learned to drop below the threshold of the utility of our military forces. They have learned not to present targets that favor weapons designed for use in old wars. When they make a mistake out of pride or overconfidence they suffer, but learn and seldom repeat failures. So when fighting against these enemies we do not name that war but use other names such as stability operations, peace keeping, and counter insurgency operations on our military effort.⁵⁸

In Africa as in Afghanistan the African or Afghan face is the key to success, but the face may not matter if the way they organize and operate their forces, with our assistance, is a copy of forces designed for another war and who's modus operandi

does not fit the operational requirements of war between communities. To mitigate the mismatch created by expensive military forces, old war organization and modus operandi, the use of military entrepreneurs may be a solution to the far away security issue, as argued by Professor Mary Kaldor.⁵⁹ By doing so the monopoly of legitimate violence is dissolved. The crucial thing is not the privatization, but the breakdown of legitimacy. The goals in new wars are particularistic, where the strategy is political control on the basis of exclusion and the tactics are terror and destabilization.

Violence may be controlled sporadically, but in situations where moral, administrative and practical constraints against private violence have broken down, they rarely last long. Those who try to re-establish legitimacy are relatively powerless in conditions of continued violence.⁶⁰ The source of legitimacy is the people, and how is the third part of the trinity affected facing contemporary security challenges?

Passion – the people

War is a social activity that involves the mobilization and organization of men, women and national resources for the purpose of gaining something important by the threat of or use of violence. War entails certain forms of social relationships, and has its own particular logic.⁶¹ In an aristocratic society where honor is the highest ideal, the willingness to die to preserve honor is noble. In a commercial society where money takes precedence, such behavior is considered lunacy.⁶² Security used to be the prime function of politics, and honor as an ideal played an important role in a government's ability to fulfill its security obligations. "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country...ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man", President John F. Kennedy articulated it in

his augural address in the height of the Cold War in January 1961, indicating both a national and an international ambition and responsibility deeply rooted in honor.⁶³

As insecurity tends to enhance the need for absolute norms, growing security is more conducive to a more permissive environment which is reflected in a growing individualism. Individuals have become the center of their own universe according to Christopher Coker, and this poses a challenge for today's armed forces facing the proliferation of laws on individual rights, placing more emphasis on individual rights than on collective responsibility impact the effectiveness of military forces.⁶⁴ A small family with fewer children, weak family connections without any particular family traditions and responsibilities is a typical family in a modern society today. There is no surplus of young people, there is no one to sacrifice, and every loss rapidly becomes one loss to many.

A society that puts a premium on individualism is likely to individualize every death, both of own as well as enemy soldiers. By placing more emphasis on individual rights than on collective responsibility, it impacts adversely the operational effectiveness of a military force. Limited tolerance against casualties on both sides is already a problem when it comes to committing troops to open ended conflicts in the Third World.⁶⁵ War as a way of pursuing interests becomes very challenging, whether it is to support incumbent governments, secure territory and gain resources or to try to prevent violence and massive abuses of human rights that attends wars of a third kind.⁶⁶

The limited tolerance of human suffering may send Western forces to war, as it did in Bosnia, Somalia and Kosovo. "We are not here to save the Somalis", Under-Secretary of State Eagleberger stated when the US sent troops to Somalia in 1993, "we

are here to redeem them".⁶⁷ But the Somalis did not wish to be redeemed and they rejected that kind of humanitarianism by killing eighteen US soldiers in an afternoon firefight in Mogadishu. In Bosnia casualty aversion among senior political and military leaders made force protection an explicit mission goal that superseded the primary mission of restoring peace in the region. War criminals were not offensively pursued, community building programmes were curtailed and every movement of a peacekeeper became a threat to the entire mission.⁶⁸ In all of these engagements, the prevention of human suffering was paramount to the engagement, but to accept the risk by doing so, and the effect it could have on domestic popular support created a tactical and operational problem.

The legitimacy to use violence on behalf of a state comes from the people. The application of violence is bounded by international law, and has to be conducted within this framework, regardless of what the people would want to achieve. With these constraints solved, the use of violence is seen as a legitimate and not a criminal act. When the people disagree because they find it inhuman, too economically burdensome or not in line with their general interests, legitimacy erodes. Legitimacy is performance based, both for the state and its different bodies including its military forces. All parts have to earn and maintain the right to operate on behalf of the society through the provision of services, also the military. The poorer the performance and the more biased in execution, the more likely that the resistance among the people will either bring down the support of the political leaders, or the executing government body or both.⁶⁹ This is democracy.

A second foundation for legitimacy is reasonable agreement between service and society.⁷⁰ Such agreements are usually subject to interpretation as social, economic and political circumstances change. Today the relationship between the professionalized military services and the state and society from which its members are recruited has become contractual. This is a development which marks a decisive break with the trinitarian system.⁷¹ The break was so grave that US Secretary of Defense William Cohen found it necessary to call on the American people to be reconnected to the military that serves them. Reconnection means that all three parts of the trinity are recognizing their mutual claims on each other.⁷²

Since World War II and the subsequent nuclear based Cold War, no wars have been decisive to Western states and societies. It was Napoleon Bonaparte's "people's war" that made war total to Clausewitz, shifting the center of gravity away from armies on the battlefield to the people on whose endurance and support the continuance of the war depended, making it ever harder to reach a "decision". Whether wars are limited or total is likely to depend not so much on the original object for which they are fought, but on the nature of the society fighting them, particularly on the degree of popular involvement in the conduct of war. The greater that involvement, often called passion, the greater is the part likely to be played by such non-rational factors as honor.⁷³

When passion is one sided, and the other part is unwilling or unable to generate the required engagement or passion, the effect is dangerous, not only to the soldiers but to the society that chooses to use its ultimo ratio, without having the required determination to do it. A capable disciplined and useful military capability is very hard to build, both in terms of competence, time and money required. It takes only minutes,

hours and days to lose it if it operates outside its legitimacy or is used to solve problems it is not supposed to do. In Vietnam US forces won the battle but lost the war. The battle was without strategic importance because it did not serve US interests as articulated by the American people.⁷⁴ Passion and honor still matters very much. It fuels the commitment the soldiers have to their tasks and it ensures necessary focus and commitment from the people towards their soldiers and their tasks.

A synthesis of the findings

The aim of this paper has been to investigate limitations and possibilities connected to war as a human endeavor. As revealed through the discussion, there are challenges connected to all three factors of the classical war theory. The politicians may have to realize that the military tool is not a tool that can be compared to and treated as a normal government enterprise. The function required from a state's military rests upon the willingness from its soldiers to put mission before self. If that connection is broken by societal trends supported by spending providing minimal solutions, there is an obvious mismatch in the logic. How can a politician ask your citizens to be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, when through priorities in government spending on defense, you show that you are not willing to pay your part of the total bill?

How can the military through professionalization still keep in contact with its society, and contemporary societal trends countering the values of a military? And how should the military prepare for the next war in general in order to meet both military and civilian demands on performance in order to earn continued trust and legitimacy? How can the people remain connected and committed to their military even if they do not see the utility of it in their secure and prosperous daily life?

If these are the main issues extracted from above, there is clearly much to do in order to answer all the challenges connected to war as a western democratic political tool, viewed in light of a classical theory of war. But does that mean that the classical trinity of reason, chance and passion is of limited value and should be replaced as a theoretical framework because it has become increasingly divorced from the characteristics and sources of most armed conflicts as Holsti, Smith and others argue? Are the “new wars” really new?

“New wars” according to both Holsti and Kaldor, aim to forge identities, but the identity is often difficult to recognize. The players are not disciplined and they fight over interests rooted in ethnic, cultural, organizational and economical issues. But is this really new or is it just one way of putting focus on one or a few peculiarities of contemporary war, and selectively using both Clausewitz’ theory and history to support the argument for change? Mats Berdal illuminates this by arguing:

By posing the question of what functional utility violence may be serving the participants in wars, to elites, ordinary people and external actors, it becomes possible to discern how a set of vested interests in the continuation of war may emerge. Over time, such interests will crystallize into a distinctive war economy, usually forming a part of a regional pattern of informal economic activity. While these war economies are costly and catastrophic for societies as a whole, they are highly profitable for individuals and groups within the society.⁷⁵

There may be a purpose behind “new war” violence; a purpose Holsti and Kaldor argues is missing. But Berdal continues:

An awareness of the economic self-interest of local elites, vulnerable populations concerned with survival, and external actors in pursuit of profit helps correct earlier and more simplistic explanations of the prevalence of intrastate wars in the 1990s. In particular, it challenges those who have seen a “new barbarism” at work in many of today’s war zones, and those who have prioritized, supposedly primordial, ethnic divisions and tensions at the exclusion of other factors.⁷⁶

According to Clausewitz; war is a chameleon that adapts its characteristics to the given case and can appear in different ways depending on time, actors and purpose.⁷⁷ Clausewitz indicates that the character of war is never constant, and will change constantly depending on cause, actors, time and purpose. The nature of war however is constant and depending on the equilibrium within the trinity of reason, chance and passion. As Clausewitz says: “A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless.”⁷⁸

So may be the “new wars” are not so new after all, and the contrast between the integrating wars of Europe and the disintegrating wars of today are merely an optical illusion based on the focal point used in the search for a logical explanation to an old problem. Maybe we have searched for answers to this ultimate question of mankind with a too narrow view concerning time, space, reason, chance and passion expecting all viable factors to be visible to us?⁷⁹ Maybe we have overseen the simple fact that the reason why we find problems connected to contemporary war is because we have ignored the importance of the equilibrium within the trinity of reason, chance and passion, and that they cannot be replaced by modern force management, technology and focus on self before community?

This does not imply that Münkler and Kaldor, Smith and Holsti are wrong when they post their theories on “new wars” basically because this should not be about right or wrong, or new versus old. It should be more about a constant ability to accumulate and evaluate every effort, theoretical as well as practical, and appreciate new views on

old unsolved matters in order to achieve a better understanding of this ultimate challenge of mankind.

Conclusions

Through the discussion above it is obvious that our western societies are severely challenged regarding the use of war as a political tool. These challenges appear out of a broad variety of reasons connected to every part of the old classical theory of war. These challenges have to be addressed and hopefully solved or mitigated, because war is here to stay. As President Barack Obama pointed out in his remarks at the acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize:

We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth. We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes. There will be times when nations -- acting individually or in concert -- will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.....I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. No peace movement could have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations could not convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not to call to cynicism -- it is recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.⁸⁰

Politics are influenced by humans and humans by their surroundings, culture, heritage, history, economy and experience. The global variety is vast and makes it impossible to predict an accurate development concerning possible emerging security issues. Since politics is the art of the possible, the limits are only confined by the imagination in each and every one of us. As long as there is no visible, likely and generally accepted security challenge, it is very difficult to establish both the reason through political focus and passion through popular support for increased defense spending on military operations in remote places against not institutionalized adversaries. Other priorities are more important to both politicians and people, and

since the politicians need the peoples support in order to survive a reelection, popular opinion often take the prime position.

To accept the limits of reason is generally everybody's challenge, but also a political responsibility amongst other political responsibilities. The assumption that war is a problem between states is still valid, simply because it cannot be ruled out due to the limits of reason, or in other words because of politics. No one can guarantee that there will not be another community, entity or state with global aspirations willing to use force against others to achieve its own goals.

Military and civilian planners have for centuries struggled with how to avoid war or obtain increased security. From Thucydides to this day, choosing the right alliances and investing in the right security tools has been the premium of the state leadership. It is vital that it remains so, because security is the main reason legitimating the state constitution. More guns do not necessarily means more security, and disintegrating states have a tendency to provide more security issues than stabile states. It is therefore important to address both internal and external challenges to a state's ability to use force when required as described above. A failure to acknowledge these challenges and not try to do something about it, will most likely mean new wars. New wars, not as "new wars", but old wars returning in contemporary clothing, just like a true chameleon.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 83.
- ¹⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 163.
- ¹⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 157.
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²⁷ Nye and Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation*, 192-193.

²⁸ Nye and Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation*, 194.

²⁹ Christopher Coker, *Humane Warfare*, (Routledge, London and New York, 2001), 73.

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³¹ Coker, *Humane Warfare*, 73.

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³⁷ Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, 21-25.

³⁸ Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, 15.

³⁹ Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, 16.

⁴⁰ Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, 17.

⁴¹ Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, 20.

⁴² See Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Operation Planning, chapter 2 and chapter 3. Synchronization and coordination of military effort in time and space is the key to operational effectiveness and use of force.

⁴³ Mats Berdal, *How “New” are “New Wars”?* *Global Economic Change and the Study of Civil War*, (Global Governance; Oct-Dec 2003), 489-490.

⁴⁴ Sir Michael Howard, *When Are Wars Decisive?* (Survival, vol 41, no 1, Spring 1999), 126.

⁴⁵ Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, 38.

⁴⁶ Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, 38.

⁴⁷ Holsti is not alone in his analysis. See Smith, *The Utility of Force – The Art of War in the Modern World*, 270.

⁴⁸ Sociologist Ronald Inghelhart, *The Silent Revolution*, 1973, referred to in Coker, *Humane Warfare*, 72-74.

⁴⁹ Coker, *Humane Warfare*, 93.

⁵⁰ For an alternative view see Charles Moskos who argues that the post modern soldier is more in step with the civilian attitudes, and that the distinctions between civilian and military attitudes are diminishing.

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⁷³ Coker, *Humane Warfare*, 127.

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⁷⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 101.

⁷⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 101.

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