

## **Unit C 18: War as an armed conflict**

### **1. Summary**

Political conflicts can, but need not, lead to wars. War can be understood as organized, targeted violence to achieve political goals. War can only be legitimate under very specific conditions - but wars of aggression never are.

### **2. Politics, violence and war**

War always has to do with political conflicts, but not every political conflict is fought with violence or war.

#### **2.1 Political Conflicts**

Eckert (2012:52) has named two preconditions for the politicization of conflicts, firstly that the conflict must be dramatizable and visualizable for media "processing", and secondly that the conflict is generalizable, "i.e. general clashes of interests or dilemmas must emerge, even if initially only local problems or specific conflicts are involved".

Eckert (2012:55) has distinguished three types of conflict that can arise in political debate:

- First, conflicts arising from changing interest positions, e.g. conflicts under the opposition of "tradition" and "progress" or due to the influence of scientific-technical innovations.
- Second, conflicts between interest standpoints and value standpoints, for example as a consequence of the extension of market mechanisms to social subsystems or areas - such as education - which neutralizes moral aspects with the argument "if I don't do it, someone else will".
- Third, the type of conflict that emerges from this, in which there is a contrast between interest-led purpose rationality and principle-led value rationality. On the one hand, there are companies and governments, as well as administrative bodies, which argue in a professional and interest-driven manner, while on the other hand

there are "volunteers" who argue in a value-driven manner and claim morality for themselves. In this context, the argumentation of the "volunteers" is becoming more professional in the context of non-governmental organizations, which increasingly leads to conflicts between national governments and international organizations.

In the third type of conflict in particular, experts and laypersons increasingly clash, with both sides having problems of understanding and comprehension. Different "cultures" clash, on the one hand technical-scientific viewpoints and on the other ethical-moral principles. In this context, the positions of the protesters appear to the representatives of technical-"rational" progress as "irrational," while the attitude of the efficiency-oriented companies appears to them as "contemptuous of humanity," "cynical," or one-sidedly profit-oriented (cf. Eckert 2012:130).

It is interesting to note that depending on whether one's own position is experienced as powerful or power-deficient, the topic of power is (in the first case) kept out of the discourse or (in the second case) made an issue of (cf. Eckert 2012:131).

Armed military conflicts also often occur when a political leader's reputation or power is tarnished and he seeks reassurance through a warlike adventure-or he simply wants to distract attention from problems at home. Conversely, international conflicts and wars lead to the forced resignation of national leaders (cf. Chiozza/Goemans 2011:46ff.).

## **2.2 War**

According to Jahn (2012:32/33), war can be understood as "a socially organized form of prolonged political struggle at the cost of the death of many combatants and bystanders." Jahn (2012:33) distinguishes war from private feuds, gang warfare, and political assassinations. According to this author, the purpose of wars is to enforce a policy of preserving or changing a polity. War represents a - different - form of political struggle in the context of which weapons are used.

It is interesting to note Jahn's (2012:33) statement that aggressors are usually not interested in war, but in enforcing their goals by means of threats, intimidation, and so on. Only when the attacked refuses to allow the aggression and takes up arms does war occur. In other words, it is the attacked, the defender, who decides whether war will occur. However, this distinction is more than problematic - and in my opinion also empirically untenable. For example, after 9/11, the U.S. decided to attack - unconditionally - Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, even though the Taliban had nothing to do with the Twin Tower attacks. Likewise, the U.S. decided to attack Saddam Hussein's Iraq, this time with the contrived - and false! - accusations of supporting Al Qaeda and stockpiling weapons of mass destruction by the Iraqi regime.

The Hamburg Working Group on the Causes of War has defined war in the following way: "War is a violent mass conflict that has all of the following characteristics: (a) the fighting involves two or more armed forces, at least one of which is a regular force (military, paramilitary units, police units) of the government, (b) on both sides there must be a minimum degree of centrally directed organization of the belligerents and the fighting, even if this means no more than organized armed defense or planned raids (guerrilla operations, guerrilla warfare, etc. ), c) the armed operations occur with a certain continuity and not just as occasional, spontaneous clashes, i.e. both sides operate according to a planned strategy, regardless of whether the fighting takes place on the territory of one or more societies and how long it lasts" (Schreiber 2010:10).

According to Jahn (2012:34), it has become customary to speak of a war only when there are at least 1000 deaths in a year as a result of fighting. Events with fewer deaths - of which more than 25 deaths occur in combat - are considered "armed conflicts" (Jahn 2012:35, Harbom/Wallersteen 2010:501).

In the 20th century, wars changed in two ways. On the one hand, the dividing line between interstate wars and intrastate wars became increasingly blurred -the two merge into each other, and both involve coalitions of allies. On the other hand, the distinction between war and peace increasingly disappeared and is disappearing, and increasingly there are intermediate stages of -not yet or no longer war or not yet or no longer peace (cf.

Hobsbawm 2009:26). In addition, the typical form of war for the 20th century, namely wars between nation states, is clearly on the decline (cf. Hobsbawm 2009:45). Unfortunately, this does not mean that there are fewer wars - it is just more often intra-state supranational wars, such as the war against Boko Haram in Nigeria and Cameroon or the war against the "Islamic State", which is fighting in Syria as well as in Iraq and most recently - through offshoots - also in North African states.

### **2.3 War as Targeted and Organized Violence**

Clausewitz already understood war as the continuation of politics by other means - than by means of violence. This understanding of war as purposefully used violence, which is still widespread today, shows that on the one hand there are conflicts behind wars - e.g. political, social or economic. To put it somewhat casually: Without conflict, there is no war. Only - and this is the other side - there is no human society that is free of conflict, or in short: conflicts are normal components of human societies (cf. also ► Unit C 2: "Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies," chapter 2.1).

Thus, those who want to fight war should not fight social conflicts per se, but should find other ways and means of dealing with conflicts - and without using violence.

Wars or acts of war are planned and organized acts of violence against military installations or soldiers of another state perceived as an adversary or against armed militias of parts of the own population. In contrast, the use of organized violence directly against the (usually unarmed) population of the foreign state or against members of its own population is not war but genocide or ethnocide. Wars are organized acts of violence between armed members of different states or groups of people, whereas genocides and ethnocides are unilateral, organized acts of violence against unarmed groups of people. For a detailed discussion of the legitimacy of war, especially the right to go to war ("ius ad bellum") and the relationship to the law of war ("ius in bello"), cf. ► Unit D 37: "Statehood, War, and Peace."

Targeted and organized violence is undoubtedly not a basic human trait, but is learned. Studies have shown that of the fighting soldiers in World War II, only just 15-25% fired their

weapons more or less deliberately at the enemy (see Collins 2011:71). Only heavy weapons, which required several soldiers to operate, had higher firing rates. Factors for greater shooting activity were greater distance from the enemy (e.g., artillery or aircraft), a strict command hierarchy and command execution control, psychologically realistic training, i.e., not drill and target shooting, but simulation of chaos and tension, and automation of the shooting reflex in dangerous situations. In the Korean War, the shooting rate of American soldiers reportedly increased to 55% and in the Vietnam War even to 80-95% (Collins 2011:79). Reasons, according to Collins (2011:79), were more realistic combat situations in the training area and strengthening the social cohesion of the fighting troops. Thus, one can confidently say that (organized) violence hardly corresponds to a natural disposition of humans. In contrast, the same cannot be said of spontaneous acts of violence that happen, for example, in the heat of passion.

## **2.4 Causes of war**

George-Henri Soutou (2012:54) has rightly pointed out that the history of war shows one thing above all: One can be surprised by war at any time.

### **2.4.1 Is the capitalist system to blame?**

Simon Stander (2014:66), in his book *Why War*, has argued that, first, violent conflict and its culmination in wars are "an invisible part of the capitalist system," and, second, capitalist growth is anarchic and regularly leads to crises whose outcome is uncertain. That may be true. But on the other hand, hardly any other economic system has led to such long-lasting periods of peace as, for example, capitalist liberalism in Western and Central Europe for 60 years now and in the USA even for about 150 years. Of course, it can be argued that capitalist countries have simply moved warfare abroad, such as the U.S. or even the NATO countries of Britain, France and Germany. But this hardly changes the fact that peace is the normality today and war the exception - and not the other way round as it was during centuries of human history.

However, it should not be forgotten that where most people live today, namely in Africa and Asia, wars are still the order of the day.

Marxists have repeatedly argued that, as a result of the long-term tendency of the rate of profit to fall (e.g., Stander 2014:106), the capitalist system has no choice but to destroy its own economic and production base from time to time-and, if necessary, through war. In the more favorable case, this happens through overproduction crises, which, however, regularly lead to recessions and high unemployment. In subsequent boom and bust phases, the production system is rebuilt and renewed at the same time. This was the case, for example, in Germany after the Second World War, when industry was destroyed, or in China after Maoism was overcome.

At the latest when the consumers, as - "absorbing class" (Stander 2014:109/110) - fell away for whatever reason, it became apparent where the cause of capitalist violence lay: In the falling rate of profit and in the crises of overproduction. Therefore, a part of the capital itself had to be destroyed again and again in order to be able to expand again. Therefore, economic crises and recessions are not the cause of the problem, but its solution (Stander 2014:108). The capitalist system produces a lot of misery and thus a lot of hidden violence, which can be seen, for example, in the high murder rates of many countries or in overcrowded prisons (Stander 2014:111).

It is undoubtedly true that the liberal market system can lead to poverty and hardship - but especially when the necessary conditions are not in place, for example when only a small proportion of demanders have access to the market, when external barriers prevent free competition, or when or if imbalances exist between individual markets. Thus, it is a contradiction if trade in goods and services is increasingly liberalized, while the (global) labor market is fragmented and partially prevented by national borders, and at the same time each country has a different - or no! - system of subsistence and social security. But this can be solved - just like the regulation of global markets - only by global state structures, i.e. ultimately by a world state (cf. ► Unit D 43: "The missing world state").

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What is undoubtedly pending, however, is a fundamental reorientation of the capitalist system toward sustainable production, toward long-term but moderate growth, and toward the opening up of new market spaces-for example, through space travel or by finding or developing new habitats.

If the system of market economy should lead to new wars - for example over raw materials or markets - it is because there are no more opportunities for expansion - or they have not yet been found.

There is a long debate about whether wars are avoidable or inevitable. Depending on the worldview held, this question is answered in the affirmative or in the negative. The various political theories (cf. in detail ► Unit D 30: "Introduction to Political Science") give very different answers to this question - as is to be expected - but most theories consider wars to be avoidable:

<b>Summary of causes of war</b>			
	System level	State level	Level of the individual
Theories, according to which war is inevitable	Realism (war is caused by anarchy)  Economic structuralism (war is caused by capitalism)		War is the consequence of human aggression
Theories according to which war is avoidable	Economic liberalism (free trade leads to peace)	Democratic peace theory  Expected theory of (greatest) benefit  Realism (war is caused by aggressive states)  Economic structuralism (war is caused by capitalism)	War depends on psychological characteristics of political leaders  War is caused by psychological misunderstandings

Source: D'Anieri 2014:214.

### 2.4.2 Strategic thinking as a cause of war?

Hew Strachan (2012:39) has pointed out that every politician is a strategist: every strategist pursues longer-term goals, which may be military or political, depending on the case. Unlike tactical behaviors, which usually target short-term gains, strategists are concerned with long-term goals.

Strategies are characterized by the fact that they do not consist of spontaneous or emotional actions, but in the deliberate sequence of individual actions with a precise calculation of the advantages and disadvantages. According to Strachan (2012:39), every strategy is based on a relationship between goals, ways or methods, and means. From this perspective, war tends to be a means to an end-such as achieving a political goal. If other means lead to the goal more quickly or are cheaper, then such ways are more likely to be chosen.

It goes without saying that every strategy also involves costs, in the form of resources needed (money, people, etc.), but also unintended effects, possibly even effects contrary to the intended goal (collateral damage!). This also applies to wars and armed conflicts.

However, one should also not make the mistake of seeing only "rational" political goals as the purpose of a war - it is also quite possible that wars are waged for irrational purposes - for instance out of a fear of national inferiority, as a result of a nationalistic "feeling" or simply out of a power calculation. The Nazis, for example, played the piano of national and racist sentiments with great success. Jihadist terrorists also work with such means (especially in recruiting young fighters abroad), but without renouncing tangible economic and political goals.

Strachan (2012:39) has suggested that strategy should be seen as intermediate between politics and war; I myself would rather see strategy as targeted, long-term, and purposeful action that is possible in every sphere of human interaction.

Wars are at least as often an expression of a lack of strategy or a lack of strategy as an expression of strategy - at least as far as the costs and effects of war are concerned. It is well known today, for example, that both sides grossly underestimated the duration and effects of World War I when they entered the war - and that was the only reason they advocated war in the first place.

However, the matter becomes difficult because, in addition to war-skeptical forces, there have always been people and groups who hope to gain an advantage from a war. These include war profiteers, for example, but also arms producers or populist politicians.

Soutou (2012:50) has pointed out another aspect: Even if a belligerent country gained the upper hand militarily - for example, the French army managed to improve the security situation in Algeria considerably in the course of the Algerian War with the help of new counterinsurgency methods, or the government troops in the fight against Muslim insurgents in southern Thailand defeated them militarily - it could (and can!) only reap the fruits of military victory if they can be implemented or "marketed" politically. Thus, the USA lost the Vietnam War not primarily for military reasons, but because of the (political!) anti-war movement in the USA, and without "media marketing" of 9/11, for example - by both sides! - this attack would hardly have had the tremendous political consequences it actually had.

And conversely, even a military defeat can be marketed politically, as Hitler's slogan "Revenge for Versailles" exemplified.

Julian Lindley-French (2012:217) has argued that today, unlike earlier wars, there is a different relationship between political and military leaders. Today, wars do not cause an immediate threat to belligerent states, rather they serve to "mobilize the nation behind the mission" Lindley-French (2012:217). As a result, the strategic conduct of wars becomes both essential and difficult. Wars today, Lindley-French 2012:217 argues, are fought to build rather than destroy; the strategic goal is post-war. However, this - one would have to object - was already the case before: Hitler's goal was the reorganization of Europe and the conquest of "new living space" in the East; the Communists wanted to win the Chinese Civil

War in order to build a new - socialist - China, which they did. What is undoubtedly new, however, is the great military and technological disparity between the warring parties (e.g., in the American war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Western Alliance's war against the Islamic State, or France's war against the Islamists in Mali in 2013. But there are other examples, such as the recent war in eastern Ukraine.

## **2.5 The Question of Legitimate Wars**

Deliberately, the question here is not whether a war is "just" or not. War, i.e. the killing of people, can never be "right" or "just". However, there can be situations in which waging a (limited) war can be justified. Leaving aside purely defensive wars - which are also permissible under international law and allowed by the UN Charter - there are two situations in particular in which military and, at best, violent intervention may be justified: First, in the case of a humanitarian catastrophe - e.g., genocide, politicide, or ethnocide - and second, preemptively, to forestall a terrorist attack or an armed conflict.

Michael Walzer has argued in terms of preventive wars in a consequentialist manner-he himself speaks of "utilitarian" (cf. Luban 2014:251): for example, the balance of political forces in Europe preserved political freedoms and therefore it was legitimate and less costly to fight before the balance became unstable (cf. Luban 2014:252). However, there are two objections to this: First, an unstable equilibrium can also lead to greater justice, which is why it is not a priori justified to maintain an existing - political - equilibrium or to forestall its collapse. Second, there is the problem that a preemptive strike must always come from one side of the conflict - or, at best, from a third party - and in both cases the question of its legitimacy arises. Preventive wars are always very delicate, among other things because the argument of "pre-empting", i.e. preventing aggression, is always interest-driven and often misused. For example, Hitler justified his invasion of the Soviet Union by arguing that the Soviet Union was about to attack Germany.

For a detailed discussion of the international legal side of wars, especially the right to war ("ius ad bellum"), cf. ► Unit D 37: "Statehood, War, and Peace."

The preemptive argument has repeatedly been shown to be unjustified, even abusive, even in recent times. For example, the U.S. Bush administration's justification for the invasion of Iraq when Saddam Hussein was accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction, which later turned out to be a mistake-or, more pointedly, a lie. Lamb (2013:94) has pointed out that, in any case, preventive military intervention must have institutional and legal backing, usually through the United Nations. Preventive military interventions are only justified if the other party expresses the intention and prepares to use force (see Lamb 2013:100).

The situation is clearer in a humanitarian disaster situation. According to Lamb (2013:5 and 84), there is not only a right, but almost an obligation, to help other communities in emergency situations, possibly even militarily. For example, in December 2001, the UN International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) stated that the international community has an obligation to intervene if a state cannot protect its own citizens (cf. Lamb 2013:84).

Lamb (2013:85) spoke of a "taxonomy" of reasons when there is a duty to rescue. In general, it should be noted that there is a duty to intervene militarily in a humanitarian way - also in the eyes of ICISS - when there is "serious irreparable harm to humans, such as large-scale loss of life arising from state action or inaction (neglect, inability, failed state)" (Lamb 2013:88). "Large-scale ethnic cleansing (by killing, forced expulsion, terror or rape) also counts as a just cause. The act of intervention is one necessary to protect persons in an urgent situation of imminent peril" (Lamb 2013:88).

### **3. Control Questions**

1. What two conditions did Eckert identify for a conflict to become politicized?
2. According to Eckert, which three types of conflict can occur in political conflict?
3. How does the difference between a conflict party having power and not having power manifest itself in political discourse?
4. What connection can there be between the success or failure of a political leader and a war?
5. How does Jahn define war?

6. Why are aggressors often not interested in war, and how does war come about?
7. How did the Hamburg Working Group on the Causes of War define war?
8. According to Jahn, at what point can one speak of "war"?
9. What are "armed conflicts"?
10. Why should initiatives against war not fight social conflicts per se?
11. What is the difference between war and genocide/ethnicide?
12. Why can it be said that (organized) violence is not a predisposition of (most) people?
13. How does Stander justify the thesis that capitalism is to blame for wars, and what are the counterarguments against this thesis?
14. What is the connection between wars and strategy(s)?
15. What are the two types of "legitimate warlike interventions" - apart from military self-defense?

#### 4. Links

##### **Definition und Arten von Krieg**

<http://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/lexika/17756/krieg>

##### **Wie ein Krieg zum Krieg wird**

<http://www.stern.de/politik/ausland/definitionen-wie-ein-konflikt-zum-krieg-wird-509559.html>

##### **Zitate zum Krieg**

<http://zitate.woxikon.de/krieg>

##### **Zitate zu Krieg und Frieden**

<http://www.zitate-aphorismen.de/zitate/suche/%22Krieg+und+Frieden%22/>

##### **Politische Berichtserstattung im Ukraine-Konflikt**

[http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/medienkrieg-politische-berichterstattung-im-russland.691.de.html?dram:article\\_id=305493](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/medienkrieg-politische-berichterstattung-im-russland.691.de.html?dram:article_id=305493)

##### **Innenpolitische Konflikte und Kriege**

<http://www.drogenmachtweltschmerz.de/ursachen/politische-konflikte/>

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