

**The Political and Military
Laws of War**

**(An Analysis of Marxist-
Leninist Concepts)**

JULIAN LIDER

SAXON HOUSE

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Contents

Acknowledgements	v
1 Introduction	1
PART I THE CONCEPT	
2 Laws of war: the concept	11
Definition and characteristics of the laws	11
Interdependence of objective and subjective elements in war	14
Necessity and fortuitousness	20
The character of laws : dynamic or probabilistic?	25
Laws are historical	28
General tendencies	32
The working formula (equation) of war	35
PART II THE SYSTEM	
3 The system of laws	47
Bases of the classification	47
Search for the basic law of war	51
4 General laws of war	60
Classification	60
Laws of the genesis of wars	61
Laws of the dependence of war on policy	67
Laws of the dependence of the course and outcome of war upon the correlation of forces	69
The special place of the law of the increasing role of popular masses in war	72
Comments	73
5 Laws of armed struggle	89
The concept	89
Laws of military art	91
Laws of the effectiveness of armed struggle	104
Search for one fundamental law	108

Consequences of the action of laws: characteristics of military art	108
Comments	109
6 Principles of military art	124
The concept	124
Set of principles of military art	127
Principles of the direction of armed forces	131
Two comments on the relationship between laws and principles	133
 PART III COMMENTS	
7 Comments on the concept of laws of war	147
The search for laws	147
Testing the laws	153
The character of laws	157
Laws must be changed	167
The reasons for laws	169
Concluding comments on the working formula (equation) of war	172
Concluding comments on the concept of laws	174
 8 Comments on the system of laws	183
The two categories: confusion in the concept	184
The groups: lack of criteria	187
Laws and principles: different or similar?	189
Lack of a general theory	191
Lacunae	192
Some proposals	204
Conclusions to the assessment of the system	206
 Appendix: Criticism of Western approaches to the causal relationships of war	217
The philosophical premises	218
Non-political approaches	220
Socio-political approaches	223
The methods	233
 Select bibliography	247
 Name index	260
 Subject index	263

1 Introduction

The aim of every science dealing with man in society is to proceed from a description of the past and empirical observation of the present to the ascertainment of the immediate causes of particular events and processes; then follow even more advanced theoretical stages, with the discovery of causal regularities in the occurrence and course of events. The attainment of such theoretical accounts of human activities will not only make it possible to understand them more completely, to explain why something that occurred in the past was in fact to be expected, but also to predict events, to encourage desirable and to prevent harmful outcomes. If it is desirable to eliminate war, a scientific inquiry into the nature of war is necessary. While this is the common ground for both Soviet and Western research on the theory of war, there are also some essential conceptual differences.

The Marxist-Leninist philosophy of science posits that to gain knowledge of the world, society and human activities one has to discover the laws that govern them. That such laws exist is one of the main pillars of this philosophy. Laws imply the repetition of events, phenomena and processes under recurring conditions, the repeatability of their features and of ties and relationships between them and other events, phenomena and processes. Without such recurrence and repeatability, in a world consisting of innumerable unique things and phenomena, no science explaining and predicting events could emerge. Science is about laws, and the laws of science reflect objectively existing laws.

Thus the theory of war should lead to the discovery of the complex of laws of war: this insistent postulate that the search for explanation involves search for laws seems to be the distinctive feature of the Soviet study of war. [1]

The theory of war is several thousand years old, but no single scientific explanation of it has been found very satisfactory; in particular, no theory has had predictive value. There has always been controversy as to what an adequate explanation of war should entail — whether it is possible to give such an explanation at all; and doubts have been expressed as to whether a scientific explanation must be phrased in terms of laws.

The present age, with its extremely rapid social and technological changes, does not favour the construction of general theories, encompassing the whole past, present and future of social activity. On the contrary, in Western science past experience is often questioned, traditional theories are rejected but no new theoretical system is agreed on. Even the concepts and definitions that for ages have served as scientific tools are challenged, and new concepts are sought that better correspond to the new reality.

War is a case in point. Under the new conditions of the restructured world and

revolutionary development of military technology, radical changes have occurred in the way internal and international conflicts are being resolved. Many in the West suggest that the boundaries between war and peace are becoming unclear; traditional kinds of war seem unlikely while new kinds occur more frequently. Thus they have begun to doubt the adequacy of the traditionally accepted conception of war as a key to understanding the conflicts of our times and to call for a reappraisal. New terms have been coined to capture the essence of the variety of armed violence, of using new forms of military power and using military power in new forms. All agree that it is difficult to agree on the meaning of war as a general concept.

Obviously, under such conditions, it is even more difficult to agree on whether certain laws of war do exist - and if they do - how to capture their elusive essence in scientific formulae. Nor is there a common view concerning the nature of the law-like generalisations about war, even if they could be made: whether they should express universal and uniform ties and regularities in the form of covering laws, or only some probabilistic correlation of events, phenomena, and objects of war. Whether they should be sought, and could be cognised by empirical observation and inductive generalisation of the findings, or whether they can be grasped by logical analysis, and reflective understanding, or, finally, whether a composite technique of cognition should be applied. Answers vary from one intellectual tradition to another, from one school of thought to another and from writer to writer.

What is now urgent, according to many scholars, is to work out the principles of an effective national strategy for managing crises and preventing war, and on the outbreak of war, for conducting it rationally. This would make it possible to diminish the losses, to achieve a quick victory, or to bring about an early termination of hostilities. In particular, the concern should be to decide how different factors facilitate or impede decisions to go to war, and to escalate military operations. An argument about the existence - or non-existence - of laws of war would lead nowhere, it is maintained. The fate of war - its outbreak, course and outcome - depends chiefly on what we think and do about it, and not on its hypothetical laws. Even if such a pattern of thought is far from prevalent and some studies aim at putting war in a general conceptual framework, it may well characterise the trend in the Western study of war.

Soviet theoreticians, on the other hand, maintain that they have arrived at the explanation of war, i.e. created a system of concepts and categories concerning war as a whole and armed struggle as its main component part, and of scientific propositions and hypotheses on war, which has culminated in a system of laws. These reflect the objective laws of war and thus express the motivating forces, the tendencies and the inner dynamics of war, and explain its occurrence, course and outcome.

To Soviet science, the revolutionary changes in the socio-political and technological picture of the world not only do not necessitate a re-examination of all scientific developments hitherto, but on the contrary confirm all the primary

principles of Marxism-Leninism, and, in particular its theory of war. Neither the diminishing instrumentality of war, nor the changing forms in which wars have been fought invalidate the basic tenets of the Marxist-Leninist concept of war and there is no reason for redefining any part of it. Changes in the world have made it obvious that class struggle on both the domestic and international scales is the motivating force of historical development, and when the struggle can no longer be kept within peaceful bounds, war becomes its main instrument. In a world where all forms of class struggle and policy intertwine, the notion of war is more than ever internally coherent and it covers all forms of such social action.

According to Soviet scholars, this allows for more rather than fewer generalisations,[2] in the search for laws and for the creation of a unified military theory.[3] Very recently they have increased their effort to complete a system of scientific laws of war: it includes a constant accretion of new laws reflecting the newly-discovered objective laws of war. In particular, Soviet scholars state that just now is the time to complete the theory of the genesis of war, i.e. to show in more detail why and how it occurs in accordance with the laws of social development, and the sharpening contradictions giving rise to its outbreak. In the Soviet view, because of the radical changes and the extraordinarily rapid development of science and technology it is necessary to make the theory of war a genuine science in order finally to subordinate war to rational thinking, and to prevent its outbreak.

This study involves an examination of the Soviet concept of laws governing the genesis and conduct of war. Since the notion of a social causal law is probably an unfamiliar one to most Western readers, a very brief indication of what is meant by it in Marxism-Leninism may facilitate an understanding of the main topic of this study.

Laws are the determining ties between phenomena, and as such, are assumed to exist in reality. In this sense, laws are 'objective', for their existence is independent of man's knowledge of them. To the extent that we do in fact have knowledge of reality, laws must also be included in that knowledge; but these laws are obviously not the same as the objective laws themselves, only a reflection of them. The laws as we know them are called 'scientific laws' to distinguish them from 'objective laws', which are independent of our knowledge.

One of the central problems in the Western philosophy of science is the relation between knowledge and reality. While ontology deals with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with such problems as how we can be sure that our knowledge corresponds to reality. In terms of this distinction, 'objective law' is an ontological concept, while scientific law is an epistemological one. Is it necessary to commit oneself to the ontological assumption that laws exist to be able to make true statements about relations between phenomena, either in terms of laws or other epistemological expressions of determination? And if not necessary, is it desirable to do so, since our ontological commitments foreclose what we can consider to be true knowledge? Since these are controversial issues on which few social scientists probably have any definite opinion, most find it

wise to make as few ontological commitments as possible. Moreover, most also avoid using the term 'law' altogether since it suggests a type of determination too strong for the explanation of social behaviour.

While recognising these problems, Soviet scholars are less troubled by them. Since Marxism-Leninism is considered to be a true science, it can be taken for granted that a Marxist-Leninist law of science properly reflects some underlying objective law. Because of this general assumption Soviet scholars, when discussing the laws of war, do not seem to devote much attention to the distinction between the ontological and epistemological senses in which the term law is used; when laws are defined as the features, ties, and relationships of war what is often implied is both that the objective laws of war are these features, ties, and relationships, and that the scientific formulae presented by Soviet scholars as laws reflect and express them properly. These formulae are therefore at times used interchangeably to mean both the objective *and* the scientific laws.

The aim of this study is neither to answer the question whether laws of war objectively exist or not, nor whether the Soviet statements about these objective laws properly reflect and express the features, ties, and relationships of war. The two principal aims are:

- 1 To organise the views representing the Soviet concept of laws of war and its development; to assess what character has been attributed to these laws, and whether the particular groups of laws can actually be classified within this general concept. I have tried to present these problems as an ontological and epistemological unity, in correspondence to Soviet theory.

- 2 To describe and assess Soviet attempts to construct a system of scientific laws, as a reflection of the objective laws discovered; this system has only begun to take shape.

Although the construction of a comprehensive system of scientific laws of war has been considered one of the primary scientific tasks, nowhere in Soviet literature has such a system been fully presented.[4] Thus, to fulfil the aims of this study, I have had not only to present in an organised fashion the Soviet conceptual framework concerning the laws of war - to put together from many more or less consistent expositions a coherent account of the nature of these laws and of their philosophical roots - but also to suggest what the Soviet system of laws might look like on the basis of various, often fragmentary presentations dispersed in Soviet studies.

I have based my investigation on what I believe to be all the non-classified material on the subject published in the Soviet Union — viz. studies in international relations and in the philosophy of war; studies recommended as texts for military education and training; political and military periodicals, such as 'Kommunist', 'Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn', 'Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya', 'Voprosy Filosofii', 'Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal', 'Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil' and others; books edited by 'Izd. "Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya"', 'Nauka', 'Gospolitizdat', and 'Voenizdat'; the latter are given the greatest attention.

given the greatest attention.

The views I have analysed may thus be considered to express Soviet doctrine on the subject. The investigation begins with the concept of laws of war and of the system of laws; — the general laws of war, then the laws of armed struggle — and closes with a comment on both the concept of laws and the construction of the system. In the Appendix Soviet criticism of Western ideas is reviewed.

I hope that regardless of whether the so-called scientific explanation of war by Soviet scholars can be accepted as such by others, or whether the Soviet scientific laws are laws by Western standards, the presentation and analysis of their work and ideas can give some insight into Soviet military theory as regards its content and its methodology. My expectation is based on the fact that Soviet scholars have attempted to present the main propositions of their military science, doctrine and policy in the form of scientific laws, i.e. the main ideas on the sources, nature and dynamics of war and the techniques of preparing and waging it.

Notes

[1] Historical experience demonstrates that wars, like other social phenomena, do not proceed spontaneously, but according to laws ('Istoriya voyn i voennogo iskusstva', 1970, p. 7). 'Successful leadership in the development of social phenomena, and consequently also of war, first of all assumes a thorough understanding and skillful use of those laws which govern the development of these phenomena . . . It is well known that war is governed by a system of laws' (Zemskov 1972, p.15).

As Soviet scholars always stress, the history of science and technology is the history of the discovery of laws of nature (Grigorenko et al., 1959, p.36). 'There is no science without laws' (O sovetskoi voennoi nauke, 1964, p.70). The revolution in military affairs is said to further increase the importance of a deep and comprehensive knowledge of laws and regularities of war which permits predictions of the character of possible future wars (M. Kozlov, 'Vazhnyi faktor mogushchestva Vooruzhennykh Sil', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 21, 1976).

Zavyalov writes that the discovery of the nature of war and its laws is the primary task of military science ('Die Dialektik des Krieges und die Militärdoktrin', transl. in *Militärwesen*, 1976:1); cf. Gareyev, 1976. The study of the character of wars, laws of war, and methods of its conduct are presented as the content of military science ('Voennaya nauka', in *Sovetskaya Voennaya Entsiklopediya*, Vol. 2, pp.208ff.). Cf. note 3 to this chapter. Galkin proposes the following as the three main directions of research in military theory: (1) the nature of war and the laws of military activities; (2) laws of war; (3) the character of the future war, the theory of preparation for it and its conduct (1975, pp.7-8). Cf. *Metodologiya voennogo poznaniya*, 1977.

[2] In particular, the concern of Soviet scholars has been for a comprehensive

definition of war, the interpretation of its component parts, its stable and changing elements, its tripartite structure, etc.; then, for the definition of armed struggle and examination of its systemic structure, and also its relation to war as a whole; for the reflection of the so-called twin-categories in war; for the main categories of war, such as the type of war, class character of war, strategy, operational art, tactics, offence, defence, etc. Comp. Grudin, 1971; *Filosofskoe nasledie V.I. Lenina i problemy sovremennoi voyny*, 1972 (quoted in the following as 'Filosofskoe nasledie'); *Nauchno-tehnicheskii progress i revoliutsiya v voennom dele*, 1973 (quoted in the following as 'Nauchno-tehnicheskii progress'); Tyushkevich, 1975.

[3] Many Soviet scholars point out that the primary criterion according to which the scope of the particular sciences is determined, and distinguished from that of other sciences, is the complex of laws and regularities which they deal with. (Gareyev, 1977; Gast, Müller, 1977; W. Kieck, 'Die Marxistisch-Leninistische Philosophie als Grundlage für die Klassifikation der Militärwissenschaft', *Militärwesen*, 1976:4; 'Über die sowjetische Militärwissenschaft' / Übersetzung aus der sowjetischen Militärpresse/, *Militärwesen*, 1978:1).

Such an approach has been reflected in many definitions of military science, some of which are here quoted: 'Military science is a system of knowledge about the laws of armed struggle and the methods of preparing for it and engaging in it.' (*Istoriya voyn i voennogo 'iskusstva'* Voenizdat, Moscow 1970, p.5). 'Soviet military science is a system of knowledge about the character and laws of armed struggle, about the military preparation of the country and armed forces to rebuff aggression, and about the methods of waging war' (Grechko, 1975, ch.10).

'Scientific laws provide the basic means for the scientific explanation of the methods of waging and comprehensively sustaining armed struggle, of the armed forces development, and the training and education of personnel. The cognition and application of the laws of armed struggle, of the armed forces development, of the command and control of armed forces, the training and education of personnel, and the relationship between armed struggle and economic, political, and ideological factors is one of the important tasks of our military science' (Zavizion, Kirshin, 1972, p.10).

'Soviet military science is a unified system of knowledge of the laws of armed struggle, the nature and peculiarities of modern wars, and the methods and forms of waging them . . .' (Milovidov, 1973). The ideas and developments proposed by military science are based on a profound investigation of the essence and natural laws of war phenomena (Kulikov, 1973).

[4] In the article on laws of war in the military encyclopaedia ('Zakony i obychnai voyny', *Sovetskaya Voennaya Entsiklopediya*, Vol. 3, pp.375-8) only a set of five laws, concerning the dependence of war, and its course and outcome on various external factors is presented (the definition concerns the internal ties of war). There follow some remarks concerning the differences between laws of war as a whole and laws of fighting proper at different levels, without any presentation of the latter, and with a comment that, because of the complex and con-

tradictory character of armed struggle and of war as a whole, cognition of the laws is difficult. Finally, it is stated that there also exist other laws determining the direct outcome of war (one of them is presented). No premises or criteria for the division of the set of laws into groups, and the less into categories of laws are provided. The whole is far from being a systematic review of the problem, and even further from a presentation of a system of laws. In some other publications sets of groups of laws have been presented which can serve as a point of departure for a system, if they will be worked out on the basis of agreed criteria (e.g. Popov, 1964, Zakharov, 1967, Marxism-Leninism on War and Army, 1972).

Part 1

The Concept

2 Laws of war: the concept

In the Soviet view, war, although a complex and internally contradictory phenomenon, full of accidental and fortuitous events and immensely affected by subjective factors, is governed by objective laws. These laws cover the whole process of the origin, development and termination of war;[1] accordingly, the main task of science is to cognise them. War, in its origins, depends on the objective socio-political development of particular societies and of the international system as a whole; its aims are determined by the interests of classes, states, and nations; its material basis, the military might of warring sides, is determined by their socio-economic system and level of economic development.

The way military operations are conducted - military art - depends on the material basis; consequently, so also does the course and outcome of war. Thus war depends wholly on material conditions, and it proceeds, like all social phenomena and processes, according to the laws of dialectics. The laws which govern its origin and course reflect more general laws covering the whole gamut of social development, which, in the final analysis, is also rooted in the material conditions of social life. These assumptions underlie the Soviet concept of the laws of war.[2]

Definition and characteristics of the laws

The definition

It is maintained that between the objects, phenomena and processes of war, as well as between war and other social phenomena, there exist objective essential ties and relationships which necessarily recur in each war. These recurrent ties and relationships are called in Soviet theory the laws of war.[3] For instance, the Soviet Military Encyclopaedia defines the laws of war as 'internal essential necessary ties between the phenomena of war conditioning its character and role in the historical process, and its origin, course and outcome'. These laws constitute 'an objective reality existing independently of human consciousness and will'.[4]

To some Western scholars the very idea of an objectively operating social law may appear strange, and for various reasons. It seems, however, that if they do not accept both the ontological principle of the existence of laws and the epistemological-analytical status of the Soviet law-like statements about the ties and relationships of war, they can view them as basic Soviet theses concerning the nature and dynamics of war and its links with other social phenomena, and assess from that angle their validity and utility as scientific tools.

Soviet theory of the laws of war concentrates on the causal ties and relationships of war, although it also considers other connections.[5] Conceptually, these laws are deeply anchored in the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, with its causal-deterministic interpretation of society and the world. The general assumption underlying all Soviet science is that all things, phenomena and processes are conditioned causally (the universal law, or principle, of causation). The universal validity of this law is said to underlie the whole process of making war: its origin, course and outcome.[6]

In presenting the laws of war as a manifestation of the universal law of causation, Soviet theorists repeat the idea which is the core of Marxist-Leninist philosophy - that is, the objective character of causal links, the really occurring and recurring ties between material (really existing) things and phenomena, which are not mere intellectual fabrications whose correspondence to reality cannot be verified.

The Soviet theory of war focuses on those laws which concern the causal influence of external factors on war, its origin, course and outcome. How war, in turn, influences those factors is not the primary concern of military theory, although recently a little more attention has been paid to the social consequences of war. Among the many kinds of internal relationships in war, the causal ones are also pinpointed, since they are said to explain the essence and main trend of the dynamics of war.

Thus the essential recurring ties and relationships which are termed laws are in fact confined to the causal ones, although this is not reflected in the definition of the law of war in Soviet science. Occasionally, Soviet scholars mention other kinds - laws of interdependence, structure, function - but they remind the reader that, in the final analysis, causal laws underlie all other kinds of law, since any structural, functional and other similar ties and relationships have their recurring causes.

Here, perhaps, it can be asked what does the term 'essential' mean in the Soviet concept of the law of war. Soviet scholars would answer that, while there are innumerable connections between objects, phenomena, and processes, only some of them are to be regarded as laws, namely the most important ones, those which characterise the essence,[7] or decisively affect the determining characteristics or qualitative definiteness of the object (phenomenon, process) and its development, and at the same time recur in each case, characterising each singular object in question (or each instance of the phenomenon or process). Policy, for instance, decisively affects the whole character of each war, its role in social development, the main features of its strategy, its course and outcome; its impact is a law. By contrast, weather may affect the course of particular military operations; however, its effects are different in different cases, its impact is only occasionally important and rarely decisive. It should be regarded as a factor to some degree influencing the course of fighting and the individual picture, but not the main development. Such an impact cannot be called law.

Naturally, the definition of 'essential' as 'expressing the essence', or 'most