

# Studies of War and Peace

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Edited by  
Øyvind Østerud

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Norwegian  
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## Preface

The Nobel Symposium on "The Study of War and Peace—Perspectives on Present Knowledge and Research" was held at Noresund, near Oslo, on 24-28 June 1985. Some distinguished scholars were invited to attend and to reflect upon basic questions in the study of peace and war. The proceedings should illuminate a limited range of important problems. Topics were to be general enough to be of wide interest, and specific enough to make fairly concentrated in-depth discussion possible. This volume presents an Introduction by the editor, the background papers at the Symposium (with minor revisions), comments by the discussants, and a summary of the general discussions. Chapter 7, by Alexander L. George, was commissioned too late for presentation at the Symposium.

The practical and potential relevance of academic scholarship within central disciplines was another of the topics at the Symposium. Different perspectives on crucial issues were examined, and are presented here.

In his opening address, the Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Egil Aarvik, stressed the precarious state of the international situation, and the importance of scientific assessment, wisdom and political will.

The Symposium was prepared by a Program Committee comprising the editor (Chairman), Director Jakob Sverdrup, Professor Michael Howard and Director Johan Jørgen Holst. As editor, and on behalf of all participants, I am grateful to this Committee for its support. The Program Committee and the Norwegian Nobel Institute extend their gratitude to authors of the background papers, and to participants who accepted the invitation to contribute to the Symposium.

I express my thanks to the staff of the Norwegian Nobel Institute for their efficient and professional organization of the Symposium, and to Raino Malnes and Helge Pharo who skillfully summarized the discussions while themselves participating at the conference.

*Øyvind Østerud*

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# Studies of War and Peace: An Introduction

ØYVIND ØSTERUD

## Perspective on Knowledge

Are scholarship, research and academic studies important for illuminating the big questions of peace and war? Scholarly knowledge is like tiny streams in a veritable ocean of popular views, political commitments, insistent agitation and practical decision-making. The role and relevance of systematic research have hardly been properly assessed. It is noticeable that pre-scientific and non-academic views on this topic are one-sided, incomplete or blatantly false. Alas, these features can often also be attributed to the more scholarly contributions in the field. Each discipline and every academic tradition has its own limited view on basic interrelationships and preconditions of war and peace. There is a biologically and a socially oriented psychological position; there are sociological traditions of a systemic, class-oriented, or macro-historical type; there is a wide variety of perspectives within economics, political science and international relations theory; there are also approaches of a more historically individualizing kind, closer to the contextual complexity and specific motivations of the actual situation. Even more confusing, there are unclear frontiers between scholarship and various political and ideological approaches. This problem manifests itself at quite different levels—from the fact that major academic positions might be said to originate from a “deep structure” of ideological dispositions, to the fact that studies concerning peace and war also attract pre-committed missionaries of various kinds. Ideological warfare is even mirrored in some of the value-loaded labels used to characterize specific traditions and networks in the study of war and peace—the fate of “peace research” or “security studies” being cases in point. The constantly precarious difference between



analysis and mission becomes even more precarious in times of high tension and strong opinion. The strife for the "relevance" of scholarship is indeed an ambiguous endeavor.

These problems will of course not be adequately resolved in this book, even though most of the contributors have had problems of this kind clearly in mind. It may be asked what contributions academic knowledge really can make; it is quite obvious that insistence on elementary academic standards—openness, systematic scepticism, conclusions from evidence and argued premises—is a necessary basis for any practical relevance.

Still, the contributions of science are, here as always, often indirect and recognizable only in the long term. At best, we recognize them on hindsight. More often, the academic origins of common knowledge, public debate, institutions and problem-solving procedures are forgotten. There are, however, certain problems that research definitely cannot resolve, problems which should tentatively be identified before accusations of lack of relevance are made. Research generally gives few simple answers to the most acute and complex questions concerning peace and war. When scholars do give such answers, they usually act in another respect, politically or in some other way. We might in principle sort out three different sets of situations.

First, the lack of clear-cut research-based solutions is often due to the fact that the questions involved are intrinsically political in nature rather than scientific. It might, for instance, be possible in principle to estimate the risks of war if one particular defense system were adapted. It might also be possible, again in principle if not in practice, to estimate the chances of military occupation at different levels of deterrent strategic posture. Research cannot, in any case, weigh the increasing risk of war against the decreasing chance of successful occupation. This is a question of choice between competing values. Scholarly analysis might help to clarify the dimensions of the dilemma and to make an assessment of the contrasting risks, but the choice itself is a political one. Equally, the evaluation of a smaller risk in the short run against a greater risk in the long run has a definitive non-scientific element. Several questions of peace and war involve uncertainty, with little prospect of a certain answer. It is impossible to be sure whether our opponent

is avoiding aggression because of our deterrent posture, or whether he would have done so in any case. The question as to what factors have preserved peace in Europe since the Second World War involves a counterfactual historical hypothesis to which there is no definitive answer. Neither do we know whether the last generation of ballistic missiles will have the accuracy in a hypothetical real war that they show during testing under quite different circumstances. Research might generally supply cues for rational choice under uncertainty; it might explain how vital decisions in the past have actually been made; but it cannot remove uncertainty.

Secondly, there are certain questions to which further research might give the answers, but which are not yet available. Systematic investigations might uncover the quasi-historical myth-making and dubious analogies between past crises and present situations. The decisive mechanisms of the arms race—if “arms race” is an apt characteristic—are not fully understood, although further research might bring vital knowledge. The contextual attributes to decisions of war and peace have in general been only marginally uncovered, although a fairly substantial number of singular historical studies have been produced. The point is that potential academic prospects of this type should be sorted out from the more clearly non-scientific questions in the field.

Thirdly, there are some questions to which systematic research, some of it perhaps not widely circulated, already supplies fairly adequate answers. There is a detailed amount of scholarly knowledge into the conditions of war and peace—more reliable information, extensive data banks, historical insight into past outbreaks of war and into the evolution of present problems, knowledge about decision-making processes, about military doctrines, weapons systems, and swings in public opinion. We also know that many popular ideas about the causes of conflict and war are over-generalized and untenable. The problem is often wrongly posed. The search for a general explanation of war might be similar to the search for a general explanation of disease, or, as Alasdair MacIntyre once sarcastically suggested, a “general theory of holes”. The problem is misplaced because there are good reasons for arguing that the word “war” is a common term for a wide variety of phenomena,

with a wide variety of "causes" behind them. Scholarly analyses have contributed greatly to the breaking up of exceedingly broad questions into manageable and meaningful portions. Here is a critical and "negative" contribution with rather wide implications. One example is the intensive popular debate between those who believe that peace is preserved by unilateral disarmament, full-scale or piecemeal, and those who believe that preparation for war is the best guarantee of peace. In fact, we do not know under what conditions it is possible to stimulate towards mutual disarmament by means of controlled one-sided rearmament, or whether unilateral arms reductions tend more to move the opponent in the same direction. Since the reactions of political actors are never completely predictable, there are no universally valid answers to such questions.

The contributions to the present volume do not display a full cross-section of contemporary knowledge about peace and war. The presentation concentrates on basic contributions from history and political science, with a few intrusions from related disciplines. These are fairly closely related fields, close enough for a fruitful dialogue; between them they also reflect a substantial amount of tension guaranteeing lively discussion. Dialogue and discussion are displayed in the book. The status of present scholarship is presented not as an authoritative body of knowledge, but rather, more realistically, as a dynamic endeavor with different tendencies and points of view.

The themes of the book are grouped under three main parts.

## Causes and Correlates of War

When war is no longer normal, endemic or imminent there is a search for its causes. The widespread modern demand for an explanation of war became an immediate consequence of European events after 28 June 1914. The preceding period of peace had been extraordinarily long, and the questions of responsibility and guilt became politically acute. The origins of the first Great War have thus been studied in minute detail, filling literally thousands of volumes. Later major wars, and War in general, have also been the subject of intensive scrutiny. Yet the question remains unclear and the answers elusive.

Firstly, the notion of war-producing causality is intricate

and ambiguous, from the conscious decisions to the opaque historical forces, or from the triggering events and mechanisms to the wider constellations and deeper tensions. Take the origins of the Great War again. Different explanations were produced in circles emanating from the immediate decisions taken during the mid-summer crisis. Looking for whom to blame, one type of search concentrated on diplomatic maneuvering, military preparations and political decisions taken by the predominant actors. Another searched for historical roots to the crisis—the European alliance configurations from the 1890s, the German imperial heritage from Bismarck, the Balkan wars. Some scholars focused on the nature of the international system—the conditions of international anarchy, the eroding balance of power, the new armaments, the secret diplomacy. One perspective, or rather one group of perspectives, concentrated on socio-economic forces in Central Europe, the internal dynamics of German society, the declining position of ruling and governing classes, the relics of a semi-feudal ethos, or the internal contradictions of capitalist society as such. The Marxist explanation combined the last point with the war-producing evolution of imperialist rivalry between states. Many commentators also stressed the importance of a specific intellectual and moral climate—like the emotional readiness of the public or the influence of Social Darwinism. Most historical analyses have combined elements from these various modes of explanation, while schools of thought have differed in the relative stress that was put on specific factors.

Pinpointing the “causes of the war” depends on which level attention is focused. A. J. P. Taylor once added complication to an already complex matter by stating that the general factors blamed for the war of 1914—like the secret diplomacy, the balance of power, the great armies—were the same that had given Europe a period of unparalleled peace. What has to be asked is thus not so much what factors caused the outbreak of war, but why factors that had so long preserved peace failed to do so in 1914. And we could perhaps conclude, said Taylor, that diplomacy was not secret enough, that the balance did not balance properly, and that armaments were too small. Here we get a glimpse of the dimensions of the problem, even when we limit the quest to explanations for war in the singular.

Secondly, "war" is a common noun for quite different phenomena. A general causal explanation is likely to be either an abstract platitude or an idiosyncratic declaration. Organized violence between large groups is embedded in the prevalent socio-political conditions. A tribal war, a war of knights, a merchant war, a modern world war, or a war of national liberation have only the most general behavioral characteristics in common. In medieval Europe, war was an integral part of the chivalrous ethos; in the early modern epoch it was ritualized to resemble the military parade; while right up to the Great War of 1914 it was still commonly regarded as quite a normal way of resolving diplomatic tension. There are few likenesses between a war of knights and the war in Vietnam, or between the Falklands war and the First World War. We might be able to explain types of war by grouping them together within specific categories, but we would still lack a convincingly fruitful system of classification: should the types be defined in accordance with different motives (conquest, pre-emption, missionary zeal, etc.), in accordance with international conflict patterns (bipolarity, multipolarity, regional power blocks, etc.), or in chronological order, with specific explanations for war in different epochs? These are still unsettled questions, although the effort is as old as any study of war.

Thirdly, different explanations of war may be partly to the point. At one level, war definitely involves political and military decisions, decisions that are manifestations of more generally recognizable behavior. Thucydides expressed a strikingly modern view in saying that "what made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta". The motives spring from power and defense, while a shifting balance between contending parties triggers off the conflict. Behavioral parameters are equally central to modern theories of deterrence and crisis resolution. If the decision to go to war involves an element of self-preserving rationality, then the nuclear deterrent has raised the threshold to warfare.

At the macro-level war is embedded in society. Nineteenth-century sociology evolved in the tension between two opposite perspectives on war—an optimistic and evolutionary view of industrial society as alien to militarism and violent conquest, against a pessimistic and cyclical view of modern mass society

as more easily inflammable, rootless and belligerent. The more grandiose perspectives on industrialism and war have been specified along three different lines. One is the thesis of international interdependence, originating from early twentieth-century studies of functional internationalism, as a condition of peace. Another line is the idea of Veblen and Schumpeter, which argues that imperialism and militarism are relics of a feudal civilization, contrary to the nature and long-term evolution of modern industrial society—an argument which is elaborated in Arno Mayer's recent study, *The Persistence of the Old Regime*. The third prolongation of the classical macro-sociological tradition is the Marxian view, which states that industrial society is a misleading category covering two fundamentally different social formations—the capitalist one, belligerent and doomed by internal contradictions, and the socialist one, peaceful after the expiation of war-producing tensions. The macro-sociological perspectives are still somewhat trans-historical in character. They can hardly account for war as a specific experience—the origins, outbreak and course of events; the participation and alliance configurations; the dates, dimensions and duration.

The latter characteristics are partly searched from a middle-range perspective, between decision-making and macro-context. This is the quest for the empirical correlates of war. Statistical analyses of numerical data have confirmed the view that war is produced by a combination of various things: there are no simple relationships between state qualities and warfare, nor between international systemic characteristics and the outbreak of war; the hypothesis of a causal relationship between arms races and subsequent war has not been confirmed; the notion of an "arms race" is also somewhat misleading, since factors internal to individual states account for a substantial share of the rearmament.

Important aspects of the decision-making and macro-historical approaches to war and peace are taken up by Michael Howard in his paper, while David Singer extracts from the quantitative study of war. The relative merits of contending approaches are debated in the discussion sections.

Part I of the book also contains explicit perspectives on the three different levels that are often said to classify theories of war—the focus on individual qualities (like the UNESCO

declaration in which it is said that war originates in the mind of man), the focus on state qualities (like the Kantian idea that liberal republics don't fight each other), and the focus on interstate characteristics (like the Hobbesian idea that international society is constantly war-prone because it is an anarchic state of nature). These alternative perspectives, however, also permeate several papers and discussions in Parts II and III.

## Strategy and Arms Control

Antagonist states with nuclear weapons and inter-continental delivery systems became a basic challenge to traditional military strategy. The major powers could no longer expect to protect their populations in the event of war. This was mutual deterrence, with vast civilian populations kept hostage for the sake of non-war. The idea of deterrence seemed to be most tenable and robust at the highest level of violence directly between the superpowers. It appeared to be far more dubious at lower levels of force and at the extended ramifications. How did the superior strategic deterrence affect the use of conventional weapons outside the mainland of the superpowers? How credible was the nuclear deterrent that was supposed to protect allied countries when the protecting power itself was vulnerable to a devastating second strike? The basic strategic problems have thus changed in the nuclear age. First, there is the problem of credible deterrence as the basic security issue is transformed from warfare to stability. Second, there is the problem of deciding at which level—below the full-scale exchange of nuclear weapons—warfare at all can be a usable policy instrument in the nuclear age. This situation requires modes of cooperation between antagonist powers—by means of arms control and crisis management—that are alien to classical strategy. The situation also implies that strategic doctrines are under permanent challenge: there are no stable and convincing solutions to the problems of extended deterrence and lower level violence. Each generation of doctrines during the last thirty years—from “massive retaliation” to “mutual assured destruction” to “flexible response” to “seamless web”—has carried the same basic problems. They have not been resolved, only built into a new formula.

Arms limitation talks between the major powers have been

relatively unproductive—levels of defense spending and technological changes in weaponry have been insignificantly affected; the concentration on symmetry and verification has brought meager results; negotiations have themselves been driving forces in the arms race, for instance by the production of “bargaining chips” which are never given up; the strategic aims of arms control have been poorly agreed upon, and stable deterrence has been defined without specific limitations; there has also been a dilemma between the aim of reducing the probability of war and that of reducing destruction should war occur.

Still, there was a strategic *rationale* for arms control efforts in the 1960s and early 1970s, culminating with the antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty. This treaty put a brake on technology and deployment that might have increased the likelihood of an unwanted war. The prohibition of ABM reduced the incentive to pre-emptive strike in a crisis, and dampened the drive for increased offensive capability. But the tendency during the last dozen years, since Salt I, has been to concentrate on numerical limitations and quantitative developments rather than on specific improvements and defense systems that might increase the likelihood of war.

This concentration on numerical deployments now dominates arms talks as well as public debate. The relationship between arms negotiations and strategic analysis has thus become even more confused, with no clear guidelines in front of new technologies and prospects like the cruise missile and the recent “strategic defense initiative”. Problems of this kind are forcefully addressed by Lawrence Freedman and Thomas Schelling in Part II of this book.

## The International System

The international system is an anarchy in a technical sense. There is no law-enforcing authority above the state units, but still the inter-state condition is not chaos. There is an element of hierarchy and domination between great and small powers. There are—in certain respects—indications of a hegemonic big power concert. There are also supernational blocks, transnational ideologies, technical and economic interdependence, and non-state actors in the field above and between states. In short,



the international system is also, as Hedley Bull has called it, an anarchical *society*, where interdependence, power relationships and behavioral norms are preventing chaos. Still, state sovereignty is a basic international condition, and an intricate problem is how peace and order can emanate from this anarchic condition. In this book, the problem is broken up and elaborated in four different directions.

First, there has been a remarkable stability in the central superpower relationship, with forty years without a major war, despite intensive rivalries, permanent dangers and several cold war crises. It seems obvious that the mutual nuclear deterrent has favored some military prudence. The informal global settlement after 1945 was also adapted to the real distribution of post-war power, contrary to the formal peace settlement after the First World War, which called for vigorous revisionist self-assertion in Europe. Tacit rules of the game also seem to have been operative in superpower relationships, e.g. respect for spheres of influence and avoidance of direct military confrontation. Such factors are discussed in post-war historical perspective in John Gaddis's paper, while Alexander George addresses the conditions of crisis management.

Secondly, the rivalry between the superpowers has been far less stable in the geopolitical "gray zones", in Third World areas with no clear-cut dividing lines or no well-established influence relationships. The *détente* of the late 1960s and early 1970s concealed the lack of a code of conduct in these areas, despite the sketch of a general agreement in 1972. Events in the Middle East from 1973, in Angola in 1975, in the Horn of Africa in 1977-78 and in Afghanistan from 1979 showed that there were basic uncertainties and disagreements about the room for maneuver in the gray zone. This was probably the most remarkable blind spot in *détente*, with rather fateful consequences for the conception as such. George also touches on this problem in his paper.

Thirdly, there is considerable unrest and warfare in various parts of the Third World, in contrast to the strategic stability between the big powers. Such cases of armed conflict may be indirectly a consequence of past and present influence from the first or the second worlds, sometimes also stimulated by external attempts at destabilization or intervention. The greater powers