PART I

Introduction

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Introduction

War is a poor chisel to carve out tomorrow.

Martin Luther King[1]

Organized violence has been the scourge of humankind at least as far back as the Neolithic era.[2] The twentieth century suffered through two enormously destructive world wars, each of which gave rise to major postwar projects aimed at preventing its reoccurrence. The victors of World War II were largely successful in making Europe a zone of peace, but not in staving off the fifty plus interstate wars fought in other parts of the world during the last six decades. These "small" wars wasted lives and resources that might have been more profitably directed to education, welfare and development. Anglo-American intervention in Iraq is estimated to have caused anywhere from 600,000 to one million lives and will cost the US upwards of US$3 trillion if veteran benefits and health are included.[3]

There is a consensus among scholars that interstate war – in contrast to intrastate violence – is on the decline. Figure 1.1 shows the number of ongoing interstate, colonial and civil wars across the decades since 1945. Wars of colonial independence end in the 1980s and civil wars show a sharp drop after the end of the Cold War. However, several nasty civil conflicts, including the rounds of violence associated with the breakup of Yugoslavia, were sparked by the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of other communist regimes. Interstate wars, relatively few in number, show a slight decline.

If we take a longer historical perspective, the frequency of war has been dropping throughout the modem era.[4] The decades since 1945 have been

[1] Black, *Quotations in Black*, p. 260. [2] Keeley, *War Before Civilization*.
[3] Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_casualties/ for a review of diverse attempts to assess casualties. Stiglitz and Bilmes, *Three Trillion Dollar War*.
[4] Wright, *A Study of War*, vol. 1, pp. 121, 237, 242, 248, 638; Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System*, p. 139; Holsti, *Peace and War*; Hamilton, "The European Wars: 1815–1914."

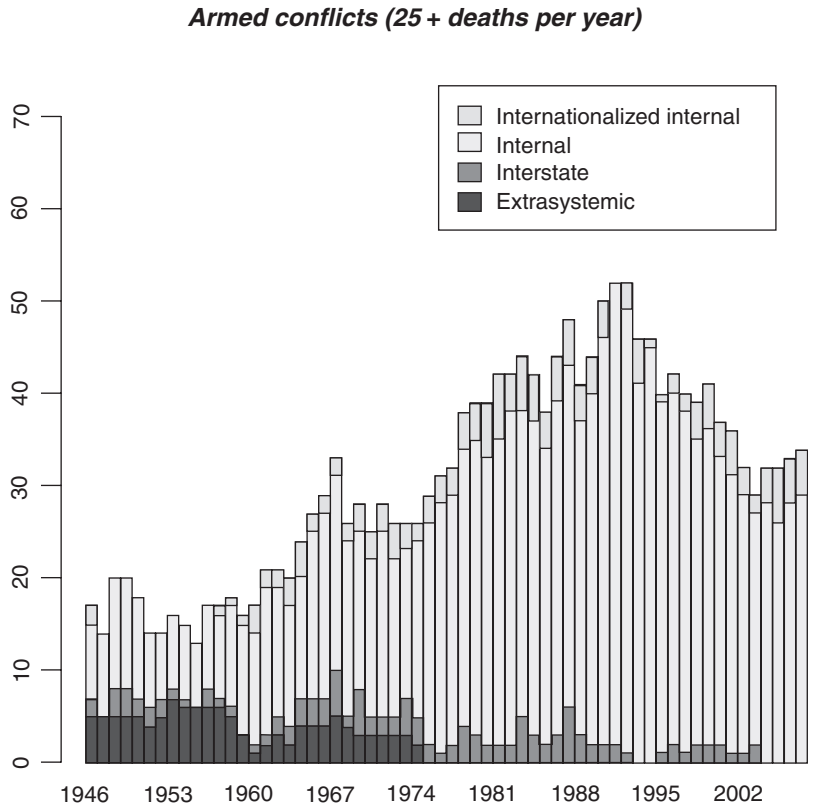

Figure 1.1 Wars by year, 1946–2007. The data are for wars that resulted in at least 1,000 deaths, military and civilian, in every year in which they are counted. I am indebted to Kristian Skrede Gleditsch for the table

the most peaceful in recorded history in terms of the number of interstate wars and the per capita casualties they have produced.[5] This encouraging finding needs to be evaluated against the pessimistic truth that the major wars of the twentieth century were often far more costly than their predecessors. World Wars I and II were the costliest wars in history, resulting in at least 10.4 and 50 million dead respectively.[6] The economic blockade of Germany and its allies in World War I seriously weakened

[5] Holsti, "The Decline of Interstate War."
[6] Tucker, *Encyclopedia of World War I*, pp. 272–273; Tucker and Roberts, *Encyclopedia of World War II*, pp. 300–301.

the resistance of civilian populations to the influenza pandemic that came hard on its heel, which is estimated to have killed another 1.1 million Europeans.[7] The Indochina War (1964–1978) killed perhaps 1.2 million Vietnamese, and 58,000 Americans lost their lives.[8] The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) produced upwards of 1.1 million casualties.[9] We judge the lethality of pathogens not on how frequently they infect populations but on the percentage of people they kill. By this measure, war became more lethal in the twentieth century even if it broke out less often. If we include intrastate war, domestic purges, and political and ethnic cleansing, the incidence and lethality of political violence increases considerably. Robert McNamara estimates that 160 million people died violent deaths in the twentieth century.[10] Our reassuring empirical finding is not so reassuring after all.

Against this pessimism, we can muster a powerful counterfactual: the number of people who would have died in a superpower nuclear war. In the 1950s, when the Cold War was at its height, US nuclear weapons were targeted on Soviet and Chinese cities. The first Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), prepared by the Strategic Air Command, was expected to inflict 360–525 million casualties on the Soviet bloc in the first week of war.[11] With the increased accuracy of delivery systems, the superpowers could use less powerful warheads to destroy targets and shifted their emphasis from population to military assets and economic infrastructure. Not that this made much difference in practice. In the late 1970s, the US target deck included the 200 largest Soviet cities and 80 percent of Soviet cities with populations above 25,000 by virtue of their co-location with military and industrial targets. An all-out counterforce attack was expected to kill between 50 and 100 million Soviets, a figure that does not include casualties from attacks on Eastern Europe.[12] The number of nuclear weapons in superpower arsenals peaked at about 70,000 in the mid-1980s; a full-scale nuclear exchange would have been

[7] Phillips and Killingray, *Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918–19*, p. 7.
[8] Cook and Walker, *Facts on File World Political Almanac*, p. 325; McNamara, *Argument Without End*, p. 1, maintains 3.8 million Vietnamese died.
[9] Cook and Walker, *Facts on File World Political Almanac*, p. 325; Chubin and Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, p. 1, estimate 1.5 million.
[10] McNamara, *Fog of War*, p. 233.
[11] Brown, *DROPSHOT*, on the early 1950s and Richelson, "Population Targeting and US Strategic Doctrine," on the SIOP.
[12] United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *The Effects of Nuclear War*; United States Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *The Effects of Nuclear War*; Richelson, "Population Targeting and US Strategic Doctrine."

more devastating still.[13] Some scientists, notably Carl Sagan, worried that such a war might threaten all human life by bringing about a nuclear winter.[14] Viewed in this light, war-avoidance in the late twentieth century seems an impressive achievement indeed.

War may be on the decline but destructive wars still occur. When I began this book, Israel was conducting military operations in Gaza, and India and Pakistan were reinforcing their border in the aftermath of a deadly terrorist attack in Mumbai. Three of the four protagonists in these conflicts possess nuclear weapons, making any war which they might fight that much more of an horrendous prospect. The study of interstate war accordingly remains important for humanitarian and intellectual reasons. The more we know about the causes of war the better able we are to design strategies and institutions to reduce its likelihood.

International-relations scholars have advanced a number of different but generally reinforcing reasons for the decline of war in the short and long term. These include economic development, the increasing destructiveness of war, the spread of democracy, growing trade and interdependence among developed economies, international institutions and norms and widespread disgust with war as a practice.[15] These explanations appeal ultimately to either ideas or material conditions and the constraints and opportunities they create for actors. In practice, all explanations rely on both, although this is rarely recognized and their interaction remains unexplored. To further muddy the waters, most explanations for war's decline appear to be reinforcing, making them difficult to disaggregate and raising the possibility that some are expressions of others or manifestations of underlying common causes.

Let me illustrate this causal complexity with the most widely offered explanation for war's decline: public revulsion. The strongest claim for the relationship between public attitudes toward war and its practice is made by John Mueller.[16] He compares war to slavery and dueling, noting that both practices disappeared when public opinion turned decisively against them. War, he contends, is now obsolescent. This comforting thesis is appealing but unpersuasive. People have always opposed war and anti-war literature has a long history. The bible enjoins readers to

[13] Natural Resources Defense Council, Archive of Nuclear Data, www.nrdc.org/nuclear/nudb/datainx.asp.
[14] Sagan and Turco, *Where No Man Thought*.
[15] Mueller, *Remnants of War*, pp. 162–171; Väyrynen, "Introduction," for overviews.
[16] Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday*.

beat their swords into plowshares, and, in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Athenian and Spartan women agree to withhold their sexual favors unless their men make peace. Erasmus exposed war as a folly in his *Praise of Folly*, as did Voltaire in *Candide*. Quakers, formed in England in 1652, in the aftermath of the English civil war, revered human life because it was the vehicle for god's voice. They were among the first religious groups to work for peace. Anti-war sentiment and writings became more widespread and popular in the latter part of the nineteenth century and more so still after each world war. Distaste for war was high in 1914, and authorities in many countries suspected that any great-power war would be long, costly and destructive to winner and loser alike.[17] European public opinion was even more anti-war in 1939, even in Germany, the principal perpetrator of World War II.[18] Anti-war sentiment was sufficiently pronounced that it became necessary for the most aggressive leaders – Hitler and Mussolini included – to affirm peaceful intentions. Japan in turn justified its invasion of China as intended to establish peace or restore order.[19] As this book goes to press, the US, another country whose public is anti-war in the abstract, has been militarily engaged in Afghanistan for almost a decade and Iraq for seven years.

Mueller is not wrong in insisting that Western publics have become increasingly disenchanted with war, but his analogy to slavery and dueling is misleading. Once public opinion turned against these practices, their days were numbered despite fierce rearguard efforts by their defenders. When outlawed, they largely disappeared and have not returned, although pockets of slavery are reported to remain, not only in remote regions of the world but in some of its most prosperous cities.[20] War is different. American opinion has consistently been strongly anti-war, yet the majority supported intervention in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Many proponents of these interventions described themselves as strongly anti-war but considered war necessary on the ground of national security. At their outset, the "rally round the flag" effect – a phenomenon first described by

[17] On the German side, see Mombauer, *Helmuth von Moltke*, pp. 210–213, citing relevant correspondence between Moltke and Falkenhayn.
[18] Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth,"* pp. 139–147; Frei, "People's Community and War."
[19] Luard, *War in International Society*, pp. 330–331, 366–367.
[20] Sage and Kasten, *Enslaved*; Bales, *Disposable People* and *Understanding Global Slavery Today*.

John Mueller – consistently trumped anti-war sentiment for a majority of the American population.[21] The inescapable conclusion is that public revulsion with war has not prevented it in the past or the present. In democratic countries, leaders have routinely been able to mobilize support for military budgets and war by arousing the powerful emotions of fear and honor.

Take the case of the Iraq War. A February 2001 poll conducted by Gallup showed that 52 percent of the American people favored an invasion of Iraq and 42 percent were opposed. By January 2003, a poll sponsored by the *New York Times* and CBS revealed that this support had dropped to 31 percent, largely due to the opposition expressed by France and Germany. Following Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech at the United Nations on February 5, in which he claimed to have incontrovertible evidence that Saddam would soon possess weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), CNN and NBC polls showed a 6 percent increase in support; 37 percent of Americans now favored an invasion. More significantly, those opposed to war dropped from 66 percent the month before to 27 percent. In March 2003, just days before the invasion, a poll by *USA Today*, CNN and Gallup revealed that 60 percent were now prepared to support a war if the administration secured authorization from the UN Security Council. This number dropped to 54 percent if the Security Council refused to vote support, and to 47 percent if the administration refused to ask the UN for support. In April 2003, a month after the invasion, 72 percent supported the war. According to Gallup, public support for the war rose to an impressive 79 percent. The increase in support in the months before the invasion reflects the all-out public-relations campaign by the administration to link Saddam to the attacks of 9/11 and to convince people that he had, or was on the verge of possessing, WMDs.[22] There was no real debate as Congress and the media were loath to voice dissenting opinions given the strength of public support for the President and the willingness of the Vice-President to excoriate reporters and newspapers who questioned his policies.[23]

When no WMDs were discovered and occupying forces faced an insurgency, public opinion polls revealed a steady decline in support

[21] Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* and Mueller, *Public Opinion and the Gulf War*; Oneal and Bryan, "Rally 'Round the Flag Effect in US Foreign Policy Crises."
[22] Lebow, *Cultural Theory of International Relations*, pp. 461–462, 469–472.
[23] Mermin, *Debating War and Peace*; Schechter, "Selling the Iraq War."

for intervention in Iraq.[24] By August 2004, a *Washington Times* poll found that 67 percent of the public felt betrayed, believing that the war had been based on false assumptions.[25] By September 2006, a *New York Times* poll found that 51 percent of Americans believed that the US never should have entered Iraq, while 44 percent felt the administration had done the right thing.[26] In May 2007, according to a CNN poll, only 34 percent of the American people still favored the war in Iraq, while 65 percent were opposed.[27]

British prime minister Margaret Thatcher benefited from the same "rally round the flag" effect in the Falklands War, and Tony Blair somewhat less so in the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.[28] Thucydides was the first historian to describe this dynamic in his account of the Peloponnesian War. Pericles' masterful speech turned around Athenian opinion, which had previously rejected Corcyra's plea for a defensive alliance.[29] In the debate preceding the disastrous Sicilian expedition, Thucydides portrays the power of a third motive – material interest – in which the paired speeches of Alcibiades and Nicias moved the assembly to vote credits for the war.[30] Has nothing changed in two-and-a-half millennia? Realists would say no. Human nature and the anarchy of the international system, they insist, make war a recurring phenomenon. The anarchy of the international system encourages the powerful "to do what they want," as the Athenians put it to the Melians, while the weak "suffer what they must."[31] I believe this pessimism unwarranted. Nor was it shared by Thucydides, whom realists consistently misread.[32] History offers grounds for cautious optimism. Unlike Athens and Sparta and Rome and Carthage, the superpowers avoided war and ended their Cold War peacefully. This outcome defied the expectations of many realists, as does the growing zone of peace among the developed industrial states. The reasons why the Cold War ended peacefully and why war as an institution is on the decline are less clear.

[24] Polls reported at Wikipedia, "Popular Opinion in the US on the War in Iraq," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_opinion_in_the_US_on_the_invasion_of_Iraq/.
[25] www.washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040820-115103-7559r.htm.
[26] Wikipedia, "Popular Opinion in the US on the War in Iraq." [27] *Ibid.*
[28] Lai and Reiter, "Rally 'Round the Union Jack?"; Lewis, "Television, Public Opinion and the War in Iraq"; Kettell, *Dirty Politics?*
[29] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I.32–44, for the speeches and assembly's decision.
[30] *Ibid.*, 6.9–24. [31] *Ibid.*, 5.85–113. [32] Lebow, *Tragic Vision of Politics*, ch. 3.

What is war?

Any study of war should begin by telling us what it is.[33] Superficially, this seems self-evident: when armies clash and people die. But this happens in civil wars and conflicts too. I exclude them from my study on the grounds that they generally arise in different circumstances and are characterized by different dynamics. There are, of course, important connections between inter- and intra-state war, as the same motives often guide their participants, and civil conflicts sometimes provoke interstate wars and *vice versa*.[34] International law distinguishes between civil war, waged between two parties of the same state, and interstate war, which it describes as an open and declared contest between two independent states that is waged by their governments. This definition is reasonable but not entirely suitable because it excludes conflicts where there is no official declaration of war (e.g. the Soviet–Japanese clash in Mongolia in 1939, the Korean War, American intervention in Indochina and Soviet intervention in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan). It also omits military confrontations between political units that have not been recognized as states by other states or their adversary (e.g. Boer War, Korean War). I consider both kinds of conflicts to be *de facto* wars.

Violence carried out by one group against another is a timeless practice. War is distinguished from violence by its political goals and the understandings participants have of its special character.[35] War was conducted on a large scale by ancient empires and over the centuries gradually made subject to certain rules. In the ancient world, rule-based warfare was most robust in classical Greece, where it was an accepted means of settling disputes over honor, standing and territory. Warring city-states would agree beforehand where to fight, agree to truces to reclaim wounded and dead combatants, and the victor – the side left in control of the battlefield – had the right to erect a trophy.[36] Aztec warfare was also highly stylized and intended to serve political and religious goals. Aztec political-military conventions interfered with their ability

[33] Vasquez, *War Puzzle*, pp. 21–28, for a good discussion of this problem.
[34] Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence*, p. 52, makes an argument parallel to mine. He contends that civil violence is often a means used by groups in the hope of reordering the status hierarchy in an upward direction.
[35] Huntingford, "Animals Fight, But Do Not Make War."
[36] Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*; Lebow, *Cultural Theory of International Relations*, ch. 4.

to repel the Spanish invaders and may have been more responsible for their defeat than Spanish possession of horses and firearms.[37]

Rule-based warfare of this kind requires numerous intersubjective understandings.[38] By the nineteenth century, reinforcing feedback between understandings and rules had given rise to a highly differentiated European regional system in which states competed for standing, and those recognized as great powers assumed certain responsibilities for maintenance of the system. In the next hundred years, the system expanded to include non-Western and non-Christian political units and transformed itself into a global system. The definition of war and the rules governing it, initially European, are now effectively international. Modern war became an increasingly complex social practice. It was based on the concept of the state: a sovereign political unit with a near monopoly over the use of force on its territory. It required a system in which these political units not only functioned but understood they had an interest in maintaining. The system legitimated actors through their collective recognition by other actors – recognizing their sovereignty – and differentiated war from peace by means of legal definitions and associated practices.[39] War was linked to sovereignty because it was defined in terms of actions that encroached on sovereignty (e.g. invasion, economic blockade). Such transgressions also provided justifications for declaring war against another state. Conceived of in this way, war became a military contest fought for political goals, as Clausewitz famously recognized. Violence, he observed, is used to bend or break the will of an adversary, but its targets and modes of application are generally determined by rules or norms.[40] This conception of war is modern because before the seventeenth century we cannot really speak of states or effectively distinguish between intra- and inter-state violence. For these reasons, Hedley Bull argues that war "is organized violence carried on by political units against each other."[41] I add the proviso, common to many quantitative studies of war, that at least one of the participating political units must suffer at least 1,000 battle deaths. This is, of course, an arbitrary measure, but one that has become a convention in the discipline.[42]

[37] Hassig, *Aztec Warfare*.
[38] Winch, *Idea of a Social Science*, p. 52, on the relationship between intersubjective understandings and rules.
[39] Wright, *Study of War*, p. 698, on this point. [40] Clausewitz, *On War*, Book 1.
[41] Bull, *Anarchical Society*, p. 184.
[42] Singer and Small, *Wages of War, 1816–1965*, pp. 37, 39, for the origins of this criterion.