Chapter 14

War and world politics

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Framing Questions

- **What is war?**
- **What is the relationship between war and politics?**
- **How should we study war?**

Reader's Guide

Along with trade and diplomacy, war is one of the oldest and most common elements of international relations. Like trade and diplomacy, war has evolved over time and changes with social context. War elicits strong reactions. Many believe it is necessary to prepare for and to fight wars against potential and actual enemies. Others believe war itself is the problem and that it should be eliminated as a means to settle differences and disputes between states and groups of people. This chapter discusses what war is, how it fits into the study of international relations, and how it affects societies and politics in the Global North and South. The chapter begins by examining the work of the leading philosopher of war, Carl von Clausewitz, in order to outline the essential nature of war, the main types of war, and the idea of strategy. It then turns to some important developments in the history of warfare, both in the West and elsewhere. It highlights the close connections between the modern state, armed force, and war.

Introduction

Questions of war and peace are central to the study of international relations. Scholars debate whether democracy offers a path to peace (**see Opposing Opinions 14.1**). Constructivists look at how friends and enemies define one another, and at the social construction of threats. Scholars of civil and ethnic wars, particularly those fought in developing countries, study ways to resolve conflicts and build a durable peace. Feminists and analysts of gender politics draw attention to the centrality of war for gender relations, and to how changing constructions of masculinity shape war and violence against women, as for example in the prevalence of rape in war (**see Chs 9 and 17**). International lawyers study the legal dimensions of going to war and of waging it. Scholars who specialize in ethics and normative philosophy also study war. Yet other scholars advise governments in how to wage war more effectively. They study what kinds of weapons to acquire, consider strategies to pursue, and investigate the character and goals of potential adversaries.

This chapter addresses the essential character of war and how it changes in different social and historical contexts. By centring attention on what war is and how it changes, we can better assess how it fits into the larger study of international relations. One of the paradoxes of war is that it is both a violent conflict between groups, and also a way in which antagonistic groups become connected with one another. That is, war is a *social relation* among the parties to the conflict. Understanding what kind of social relation war is helps to situate it in the study of world politics. Doing so reveals that different parts of the world have experienced war very differently.

Opposing Opinions 14.1 Democracy creates peace among states

For

Immanuel Kant thought representative government could bring an end to war. In *Perpetual Peace*, written in 1795, Kant argued that Europe would always be at peace if it were composed only of republics which obeyed the rule of law, guaranteed freedom of travel, and were members of an international federation (Kant 1991: 93–130).

Statistical tests suggest Kant might have been right. Depending on the exact definitions and data sets used, the finding is that no or very few democratic states have waged war against one another since 1816 (Doyle 1983*a*, 1983*b*; Russett et al. 1993; Rummel 1997).

Democratic institutions make it harder for a state to go to war. Separation of powers in government, the rule of law, and a free media and public opinion all constrain the ability of leaders to go to war.

Democrats do not like to go to war against other democrats. Liberal opinion in one democracy will argue against going to war against another democracy. According to John Owen (1998), this is why Britain and the US did not go to war against one another after the War of 1812, despite serious crises in the nineteenth century.

Against

Statistical studies linking democracy with peace are less convincing than they appear. Prior to 1939, there were very few democracies, especially if one considers as democratic only states with universal adult suffrage. After 1947, liberal democracies were allied with one another against the Soviet bloc and had little reason to go to war with each other (Gowa 2000).

Democratic states have fought against democratic movements. Western states have waged war against popular insurgencies, such as anti-colonial movements or those seeking to remove authoritarian governments allied with the West.

Democracies fight covert wars that do not appear in statistical tests. The US overthrew a number of elected regimes it feared were susceptible to communism during the cold war, but used the CIA and foreign proxies to do so (Barkawi 2001).

Explanations for peace are to be found at the level of the international system, not regime type. Factors such as the balance of power, the relationship between the Global North and South, or the advent of nuclear weapons better explain when wars occur and what kinds of wars are fought (Barkawi and Laffey 1999; Layne 1994).

1. Do 'democracy' and 'war' change over time? Can their definitions be fixed for statistical tests?

2. Why do democratic states remain likely to go to war with non-democratic states?

3. Are the exceptions to the 'democratic peace' significant?

For advice on how to answer these questions, see the pointers **www.oup.com/he/baylis8e**

Defining war

What is war? How should one think about it in the study of world politics? First, wars have happened in all known recorded histories. War predates the world of sovereign states, as well as that of globalization. War is very old, and it is all too common. It will likely be with us long into the future. If war is a historical constant in one sense, in another it varies endlessly. War takes many different forms, from violent feuds between local clans to the world wars of the twentieth century. In essence, war happens when two or more groups conduct their relations with one another through violence. They organize themselves to fight each other. Many different kinds of groups have done this: tribal peoples, nation-states, street gangs, guerrilla and terrorist groups. They have used diverse weapons, from swords to rifles, slings to drones, wooden ships to nuclear-powered aircraft carriers.

War is organized violence between political entities. A political entity in this context is any kind of group capable of waging war. Such a group has a leadership and it has resources—the human and material means—to organize violence. To organize violence means to assemble an armed group, one capable of fighting other armed groups. War happens when such groups actually fight each other. War varies greatly because fighting takes so many different forms. War is shaped by the kinds of societies that fight it, by the prevailing level of technology, by culture, by economic circumstances, and by many other factors. War always has an underlying similarity—violence between groups—but this shifts and changes depending on when and where it is fought, and between whom is it fought. This changing character of war can be captured through the idea of **war and society**: society shapes war, and war shapes society.

This discussion yields a definition of war (organized violence between political entities) and a broad approach to studying it (war and society). However, one last element of war is still missing. When a political entity fights a war, its leadership has in mind a purpose for the violence. They have some idea of what they might gain, or protect, by going to war. This determines how a political entity plans and prepares for war, and the moves it makes once it goes to war. Thinking about the purposes pursued in war, and the planning and preparation involved, is the subject of **strategy**. Political and military leaders try to make war serve as an instrument, a means to an end they are trying to achieve. They think strategically, trying to connect the means—war, violence—to some purpose, such as defending their homeland; seizing a piece of territory; gaining independence; or pursuing an ideological goal, such as spreading communism or Islam, or making the world safe for democracy or from terror. In contrast to strategy, tactics are the techniques employed by armed forces to fight other armed forces, to win the combats or battles that make up a war. Classically speaking, strategy is the art of arranging battles to serve the purposes of the war, while tactics are the art of winning battles (**see Box 14.1**).

In sum, war is organized violence among groups; it changes with historical and social context; and, in the minds of those who wage it, it is fought for some purpose, according to some strategy or plan.

Box 14.1 Clausewitz on strategy and tactics

The conduct of war … consists in the planning and conduct of fighting. [Fighting] consists of a greater or lesser number of single *acts, each complete in itself*, which … are called 'engagements' [or battles]. This gives rise to the completely different activity of *planning and executing these engagements themselves*, and of *coordinating* each of them with the others in order to further the object of the war. One has been called *tactics*, and the other *strategy* … According to our classification, then, tactics teaches *the use of armed forces in the engagement*; strategy, *the use of the engagement for the object of the war.*

(Clausewitz 1976: 128; emphasis in original)

Key Points

- War is organized violence among political entities, including both states and non-state actors.
- War has occurred frequently in history, but changes with context.
- Many kinds of groups can wage war, but in order to do so they have to 'organize violence' or create an armed force.
- A 'war and society' approach to the study of war looks at how war has shaped society and at how society has shaped war.
- Strategy is a plan to make the war serve a political purpose, while tactics are the techniques that armed forces use to win battles.

War: international *and* global

How does war fit into the study of world politics? A first cut at this question begins with the sovereign state. Today's world can be described as national–international. National refers to nation-states, the main 'units' of the international system. International refers to relations among sovereign nation-states.

From this national–international perspective, there are two types of war: **civil war** within a state, and **international war** between two or more states. A civil war happens when internal groups battle over control of a sovereign state, or when a group or groups within a state want to secede and form their own state. In the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), republicans and fascists fought over who was to govern Spain. The American Civil War (1861–5) started when southern states organized a confederacy and tried to secede from the United States. An international war occurs when two or more sovereign states fight each other. An example is the Iran–Iraq War (1980–8), which began when Iraq invaded Iran.

International and civil wars comprise an important tradition in the study of war. However, war is both older than the sovereign state and likely to endure into any globalized future. This suggests that we should think also about war outside of the sovereign state system. Until the 1960s, much of the world was made up of empires and colonies. The way in which these empires broke up set the stage for many of the conflicts that followed.

Many of the wars fought to build and defend empires, and those which followed in the wake of empire, do not fit into the model of a world made up of sovereign nation-states. Wars today, and in the past, involve complex combinations of state and non-state actors fighting in a single territory, or across many territories. Civil wars often involve an array of international actors and dimensions (**see Box 14.2**). War has evolved within and beyond the nation-state. The global war on terror has brought together police, intelligence, and military forces, within and among countries, to share information and conduct operations. The war on terror is fought across many different territorial jurisdictions in connected ways. A bewildering array of actors, separately and in combination, engage in contemporary conflict.

The imperial past and the transnational present point to a second, global approach to the study of war in world politics. Globalization involves the circulation of people, goods, and ideas around the planet. War is one form that this circulation takes (Barkawi 2005). War connects the groups waging it. During the US invasion and occupation of Iraq (2003–11), Iraqi and American histories became entangled. What happened in Iraq affected the United States, and what happened in the United States affected Iraq. War reorganizes the political entities and societies that wage it. In doing so, war can have global effects. For example, the Second World War was composed of many different, but connected, conflicts in Europe and the Asia Pacific, and is conventionally dated between 1939 and 1945 (**see Case Study 14.1**). As the war developed, it conjoined conflicts across vast spaces, killing over 60 million people. It was a global experience, even if remembered—and dated—differently by different countries. Some consequences of the Second World War were the formation of the United Nations; the fatal weakening of the European empires, leading to the new states that emerged from decolonization in Africa and Asia; and new technologies, such as jet aircraft and nuclear weapons, which fundamentally altered the world that followed. The Second World War demonstrates how the

Box 14.2 The international dimensions of 'civil war'

Many contemporary wars are 'civil' wars in that they are fought on the territory of a sovereign state, and ultimately concern how and by whom that territory is to be governed. But these civil wars typically involve an array of international actors, such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), humanitarian organizations and NGOs, foreign fighters such as jihadis, and the covert or overt involvement of foreign states. NATO intervention was decisive in civil conflicts in Kosovo in 1999 and Libya in 2011. In the on-going Syrian civil war that began in 2011, several foreign states are directly and indirectly involved, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United States, France, and Britain. Also involved in Syria is Hezbollah, a political party and armed group in Lebanon. Important populations and groups in the Syrian civil war stretch across different states, such as the Kurds, who are also in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. Religion and politics bond together actors across borders, as with Hezbollah, Shi'a Iraqi militias, and Iran. The so-called Islamic State, another party involved in the Syrian civil war, at one point controlled territory across Iraq and Syria and had links to affiliates based in Libya, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria, among other states. These international dimensions of 'civil' war show how the political groups and forces that wage war are in tension with, and spread across, the sovereign territories of the national–international world.

Case Study 14.1 War and Eurocentrism: the Second World War

Chinese soldiers en route to India, Second World War

While most of the wars mentioned in this chapter are followed by their official dates in parentheses, these dates are subject to dispute. For example, in Britain, the Second World War is dated 1939–45. Britain entered the war in September 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland; the war ended for Britain in 1945, when Germany surrendered in May and Japan in August. In many histories of the war, these dates are taken as definitive, as marking the beginning and ending of the Second World War. We conceive a world war through European lenses (J. Black 1998).

What made the Second World War a world war, and a global experience, was the conjoining of the war in Europe with that in the Asia Pacific. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 brought the United States into the war. For the United States, the war dated from then until Japan's surrender in 1945. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor grew out of its involvement in a war in China, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), a war rooted in resistance to Japan's invasion and occupation of Manchuria from 1932. The Western powers imposed an embargo on Japan because of its actions in China. Japan decided it had to expand the war to acquire oil and other raw materials for its war effort in China, which led to Pearl Harbor. Japan's war in China, in turn, was nested within the Chinese Civil War between Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China and Mao Zedong's communist party. This war raged between 1927 and 1936, paused for a truce to fight the Japanese, and started again in 1945, ending in 1950. In China, the Second World War is known as the anti-Japanese Resistance War. It was only a part of the more fundamental struggle over who would govern China that began in 1911 when the last imperial dynasty fell.

For North Americans and Western Europeans, the Second World War is usually understood as a war between democracy and totalitarianism. But for East Europeans, Balts, many Ukrainians, and others, 1945 brought a Soviet occupation that would not end until the Berlin wall fell in 1989. East and West Europeans remain divided to this day over the memory and meaning of the Second World War.

Similarly, for South Asians, the Second World War ultimately brought them independence in 1947, not from the Japanese or Germans, but from the British. As in the First World War, the British did not intend to give their own colonies self-determination. They were only forced to do so because the Second World War drastically weakened Britain and it could no longer afford to hold on to India. Because the British had not promised independence at the beginning of the Second World War, some Indians fought on the side of the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan).

Like the Indians, Koreans (who were ruled by Japan) ended up on both sides; many were recruited to serve in the Japanese army, while others joined Mao Zedong's communists and fought first the Japanese and then Chiang Kai-shek's forces. When Mao was victorious, he sent his Korean soldiers home to North Korea, where they helped invade South Korea in June 1950, beginning the Korean War (1950–3).

When the Second World War happened, and what the war was about politically, shifted with geography. The interconnections among various wars and combatant societies can be difficult to see when we use only the official, Eurocentric dates that separate out different wars.

Question 1: Why is it difficult to definitively date wars?

Question 2: Why do the familiar dates of major wars seem to reflect Western experience?

war and society approach described above applies not only to the societies directly engaged in war, but to the shape of world politics as a whole.

War, then, connects peoples and places and has global dimensions. At the same time, the contemporary world remains organized around sovereign nation-states. States generally possess the greatest military power, even if they cannot always use it effectively. Wars are shaped by the national–international world in which they are fought. Both the international and the global are important in the study of war and world politics. To think more deeply about what war is, the next section turns to the principal philosopher of war, Carl von Clausewitz.

Key Points

- International war is a war fought between two or more sovereign states.
- A civil war is a war fought inside a sovereign state, but which in practice may involve many different international actors.
- Wars connect the combatant societies; through war, the parties to the conflict shape one another.
- Wars lead to the global circulation of people, goods, and ideas.
- Wars can shape world politics as a whole and have long-lasting consequences.

Clausewitz's philosophy of war

Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) was a Prussian officer in the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15). He served on the staffs of generals and directed Prussia's war college. He died unexpectedly in a cholera epidemic, leaving behind unfinished papers which his wife, Marie, drew together and published as *On War* (Clausewitz 1976). This text is read in nearly every military academy and staff college in the world. Clausewitz was still working out his ideas when he died. His lengthy papers are subject to multiple, even contradictory interpretations.

Clausewitz's trinities

Clausewitz tried to capture the nature of war through the idea of 'trinities'. A trinity is made up of three different factors or tendencies, each of which can vary, creating many different possible combinations. According to Clausewitz, war has three dominating tendencies—passion, chance, and reason—which come together in varying combinations in any given historical instance of war. War always involves passion, in the motives for fighting and in the enmities that inspire and sustain killing in war. War is also a sphere of radical contingency, of sheer chance. Anything can happen. All the different elements involved in military operations, from human error to the weather, created infinite, unpredictable combinations that shape the outcomes of wars and the fates of peoples. Finally, as in the notion of strategy, war involves reason. Political leaders and military staffs seek to achieve objectives through war. In doing so, they subject the use of violence to rationality; they try to contain and direct the violence to particular military and political purposes. Fundamentally, Clausewitz believed that war consists of various combinations of passion, chance, and reason.

Clausewitz went on to connect this primary trinity to a second one, associating each of the three tendencies with a component of a political entity. The realm of passion he connected to the people, their feelings and beliefs about a war, and their will—or lack thereof—to wage it. Chance he gave to the armed forces, who have to test their abilities against the trials and fortunes of war. Reason he attributed to leadership, to the political authorities who decide on the war and set its ultimate aims, and to the generals and other military leaders who have to translate these aims into reality. Like the primary trinity of passion, chance, and reason, the elements of this second trinity come together in variable configurations in any actual instance of war. The character of the combatant peoples, the qualities of their armed forces, and the abilities of their leaders determine the course of wars.

Limited and total war

From the basic framework of the two trinities, Clausewitz developed several additional points about the nature of war. One is that there are broadly two types of war: limited and total. A **limited war** is fought for a lesser goal than political existence, for example a war over a disputed territory or access to markets. The Falklands/Malvinas War (1982) was a limited war for both Argentina and the United Kingdom; whatever happened to the islands it was fought over, both states would exist after the war. They never planned to invade each other's home territories. A **total war** occurrs when a state or other political entity is fighting for its existence. In the Second World War, the Allies demanded unconditional surrender from Nazi Germany. The war ended Adolf Hitler's regime, the Third Reich. Note that a war can be limited for one participant, and total for another. During the First Indochina War (1946–54), Vietnamese forces fought for liberation from the French empire (**see Case Study 14.2**). The war was total for the Vietnamese—about the possibility of independence—while France would continue as a state with or without its empire in Indochina. The war was a limited one for France.

The distinction between limited and total wars is connected to another distinction: between real, or actual, war, on the one hand, and the true, or absolute, nature of war on the other. Real wars, wars that historically happened, were always limited by certain factors. Human beings could only do so much violence to one another (Clausewitz was writing before nuclear and biological weapons). Things always conspired to limit, to some degree, the amount of violence that might occur in war. One limiting force Clausewitz called friction. Friction was like a Murphy's Law of war: everything that can go wrong, will go wrong. Clausewitz thought that another limiting force was policy, the strategy a political entity was following. Leaders would try to keep the war on track, to achieve its purpose.

Case Study 14.2 War and society: France, the United States, and Vietnam

Vietnamese and Western evacuees wait inside the American Embassy compound in Saigon hoping to escape Vietnam via helicopter before the arrival of North Vietnamese troops

France and the United States fought two long wars in Vietnam after the Second World War, known respectively as the First and Second Indochina Wars (1946–54, 1955–75). The wars in Indochina are case studies in how war conjoins countries in a violent, mutual embrace in which passion overcomes reason. The wars shaped politics in all the combatant societies during the fighting and even long after it stopped.

Vietnam had been part of the French empire from 1884. The Vietnamese independence leader, later known as Ho Chi Minh, was at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919. He had hoped to see President Woodrow Wilson and make his case for the self-determination of the Vietnamese people. Ignored, Ho Chi Minh shifted to communist and radical politics, and returned home to fight for independence. The Japanese occupied Vietnam during the Second World War and Ho Chi Minh was ready to take over when they surrendered. But Britain sent its Indian army to Vietnam to hold it until France returned. Humiliated by its defeat at the hands of Nazi Germany, France hoped to restore its sense of greatness by reasserting its imperial role in the world. A nine-year war ensued between France and the Viet Minh (as Ho Chi Minh's forces were known), with France's involvement largely paid for by the United States. France supported US policy in Europe in exchange. The Soviet bloc supplied the Viet Minh, who finally defeated France at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Even more humiliated, now having been defeated by non-Europeans, the French army returned home and went on to fight in Algeria, where another independence struggle was under way. When the French started to lose in Algeria, elements of the French army along with European settlers in Algeria plotted a coup attempt. The French Fourth Republic fell and Charles de Gaulle returned to power. France had suffered regime change as a result of losing colonial wars.

At the Geneva Peace Conference of 1954, Vietnam was divided between a communist North under Ho Chi Minh and a new state in the South, under Ngo Dinh Diem, supported by the United States. A guerrilla insurgency broke out in South Vietnam, supported by North Vietnam and its Soviet bloc allies. At first the United States sought to conduct the war with advisers and other assistance, but in 1965 it committed its own troops, eventually numbering over 500,000. The United States, like France, believed it could not lose a war to non-Europeans, and was afraid of showing weakness to the Soviets. But it could not decisively defeat the insurgency or the North Vietnamese troops who infiltrated into South Vietnam. The Vietnam war ended President Lyndon Johnson's hopes of re-election, while President Richard Nixon's administration expanded the war into Laos and Cambodia in increasingly desperate efforts to bring it to a close. South Vietnam finally fell to the North Vietnamese in April 1975. The United States, too, had been humiliated.

As a consequence, the war in Vietnam came to occupy a central place in US politics, society, and culture for decades. Presidential candidates were vetted for what they had done during the war. Were they war criminals or heroes? Had they supported the war? Did they evade the draft? Hollywood joined the fray with numerous movies about the war. The films not only traced American society's efforts to come to terms with the war, they also rewrote history and ventured into the realm of masculine fantasy. Sylvester Stallone's character Rambo sought to restore America's honour by returning to Vietnam to rescue US prisoners of war left behind. When the United States went to war against Iraq over the invasion of Kuwait in 1990–1, President H. W. Bush claimed it had kicked the 'Vietnam syndrome', the reluctance of the United States to use force after defeat in Vietnam. Like the French war in Algeria, both of the US wars against Iraq (1990–1, 2003–11) were shaped by the putative lessons of Vietnam. In 2004, the war in Vietnam was again front-page news as the Democratic Party presidential candidate John Kerry was attacked over his military service and his subsequent anti-war activism. In the 2016 Republican primary campaign, candidate Donald Trump argued that Senator John McCain was not a hero because he had been captured by the North Vietnamese.

It took Vietnam decades to recover from the wars. While France and the United States suffered casualties in the tens of thousands, the Vietnamese lost between 2 and 3 million people in three decades of war. Much of South Vietnam had been sprayed with Agent Orange (a herbicide) by the United States, and unexploded ordnance continues to claim lives to this day.

Question 1: How and why do wars continue to shape society and politics after they end?

Question 2: What do the wars in Vietnam tell us about the relationship between democracy and war?

When this was accomplished, or when it was no longer possible, the war would be drawn to a close.

However, in contrast to these limiting factors of real war, the true or absolute nature of war was escalatory. Clausewitz thought that war has an inherent tendency to extremes, to ever more violence. Each side is tempted to increase the amount of force it is using to try to defeat the enemy, to compel surrender. War tries to draw into its cauldron ever more human and material resources. Left to its own devices, in the absence of policy and friction, war would escalate in scale; become more violent; go on longer; and extend over more space. As Clausewitz (1976: 77) noted, war is an act of force and there is no logical limit to an act of force. Each move is checked by a stronger countermove until one of the combatants is exhausted. This inherent tendency of war to escalate is moderated by the real human limits on the use of force.

War and politics

For Clausewitz, some of the limits to the use of force potentially arose from reason, in the form of strategic policy, the goal or purpose leaders were pursuing in going to war. His most famous aphorism was that war is a continuation of politics, with the use of other means (**see Box 14.3**). By this he meant that war does not put a stop to politics, to relations with the other side. What happens is that violence is added to those relations. A state can threaten or use force as a negotiating move, to get another state or political entity to do what it wants. For example, in order to get the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, or North Vietnam) to sign the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, the United States heavily bombed Hanoi and Haiphong in December 1972. The basic idea is that the political purpose behind the use of force—such as getting the DRV to the negotiating table—limits the use of force. One uses only enough force to achieve the aim, as any more may be counterproductive. In a war, force becomes part, but not all, of the on-going political intercourse between states and other combatants. In making war an instrument to achieve purposes, politics could limit or contain its violence.

But Clausewitz was well aware of a problem with this thesis. A different kind of politics, such as nationalism for example, could have the opposite effect on violence. Especially when it comes to war, passions can overcome reason. Some political ideologies have irrational aims that can only be achieved through extreme violence, such as Hitler's vision of eradicating European Jews. In Clausewitz's own time, the French Revolution had mobilized the people for war, creating large armies of revolutionary citizens. Politics fuelled rather than limited the violence of war: 'War, untrammeled by any conventional restraints, had broken loose in all its elemental fury' (Clausewitz 1976: 593).

Revolutionary and Napoleonic France pursued ultimate aims. In seeking to establish French-allied republics in states and principalities across Europe, France posed an existential challenge to the monarchical regimes of the continent. Consequently, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were total in character; they provided the historical models for Clausewitz's theories. The twentieth century, with its two world wars and the cold war, opened up new and horrifying possibilities for the totalization of war. The capacities of modern states to organize unprecedented levels of violence seem unlimited.

Clausewitz's aphorism about war being the continuation of politics draws our attention to how politics can both limit and fuel the violence of war. It also highlights that war connects the politics of combatant societies. What happened at the war front affected what happened back home. For example,

Box 14.3 Clausewitz on the primacy of politics in war

Policy [or political purpose] is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political … In short, at the highest level, the art of war turns into policy—but a policy conducted by fighting battles rather than by sending diplomatic notes. We can now see that the assertion that a major military development, or the plan for one, should be a matter for *purely military* opinion is unacceptable and can be damaging. Nor indeed is it sensible to summon soldiers, as many governments do when they are planning a war, and ask them for *purely military advice* … No major proposal for war can be worked in ignorance of political factors; and when people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not really saying what they mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not with its influence. If the policy is right—that is, successful—any intentional effect it has on the conduct of the war can only be to the good. If it has the opposite effect the policy itself is wrong … Once again: war is the instrument of policy. It must necessarily bear the character of policy and [be measured] by its standards.

(Clausewitz 1976: 607–8, 610; emphasis in original)

Case Study 15.1 Insecurity in the post-cold war world: the Democratic Republic of Congo

Campaign rally in December 2018, Democratic Republic of Congo

Events in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since the end of the cold war provide a good illustration of the complexities of contemporary conflict and the dangers of providing simple explanations of why wars occur (**see Case Study 21.1**). Between 1996 and 2016, in this 'forgotten war' (sometimes called 'Africa's World War'), it is estimated that 6 million people lost their lives as a result of ethnic strife, civil war, and foreign intervention, as well as starvation and disease. The key events are as follows.

In 1996 the conflict and genocide in neighbouring Rwanda (in which 800,000 people died) spilled over into the Congo (named Zaire at the time). Rwandan Hutu forces, who fled after a Tutsi-led government came to power, set up bases in the east of the country to launch attacks on Rwanda. This resulted in Rwandan forces invading the Congo with the aim of ousting the existing government of Mobutu Sese-Soko and putting in power their own government under Laurent-Désiré Kabila. This was achieved in May 1997. Kabila fell out with his backers in August 1998, however, and Rwanda and Uganda initiated a rebellion designed to overthrow him. This led to further intervention, this time by Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad, and Sudan, in support of the Kabila government. Although a ceasefire was signed in 1999, fighting continued in the eastern part of the country. In January 2001 Kabila was assassinated and replaced by his son, Joseph Kabila. Fighting continued until 2003, partly due to ethnic divisions (the DRC is a country of 250 ethnic groups and 242 different languages), but also because of the continuing occupation by foreign troops (often engaged in illegal mining of minerals and diamonds). Negotiations designed to broker a peace agreement eventually led to the Pretoria Accord in April 2003. As a result, some of the foreign troops left, but hostilities and massacres continued, especially in the east of the country, as rival militias backed by Rwanda and Uganda continued to fight and plunder the resources of the DRC.

On 18 July 2003, the Transitional Government was set up as a result of what was known as the Global and Inclusive Agreement. The Agreement required all factions to help reunify the country, disarm and integrate the warring parties, and hold elections. Continued instability, however, meant that elections did not take place until 2006. Conflict continued among foreign troops and numerous militia groups on the Rwandan and Ugandan borders, causing serious refugee crises and civilian deaths. Elections to replace President Kabila were scheduled for November 2016 but were postponed until the end of 2017, when they were postponed again. Protests from those opposed to President Kabila led to violence and the deaths of large numbers of people. New elections finally took place in December 2018. In January 2019, it was announced that Felix Tshisekedi, leader of the main opposition party, was the surprise winner, defeating the government candidate, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary. This represented the first electoral transfer of power in 59 years. However, concerns remained about electoral fraud and continuing violence, with another opposition candidate, Martin Fayulu, also claiming victory. Continuing militia violence in eastern DRC also complicated attempts by health workers to deal with the outbreak of Ebola during 2019.

Question 1: Why did the Global and Inclusive Agreement of 2002 fail to resolve the conflict in the DRC?

Question 2: Is the conflict in the DRC a good example of the value of the concept of human security?

The traditional approach to national security

As **Chapter 2** shows, from the 1648 **Treaties of Westphalia** onwards, states have been regarded as by far the most powerful actors in the international system. They have been 'the universal standard of political legitimacy', with no higher authority to regulate their relations with each other. This has meant that security has been seen as the priority obligation of state governments. States have taken the view that there is no alternative but to seek their own protection in what has been described as a **self-help** world.

In the historical debate about how best to achieve national security, such writers as Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Rousseau tended to paint a pessimistic picture of the implications of state sovereignty. They viewed the international system as a rather brutal arena in which states would seek to achieve their own security at the expense of their neighbours. Inter-state relations were seen as a struggle for power, as states constantly attempted to take advantage of each other. According to this view, permanent peace was unlikely to be achieved.

All that states could do was to try to balance the power of other states to prevent any one from achieving overall **hegemony**. This view was shared by writers such as E. H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau, who developed what became known as the realist (or 'classical' realist) school of thought in the aftermath of the Second World War. More recent attempts to update these ideas can be seen in the works of Alastair J. H. Murray, Thomas Christensen, Randall Schweller, William Wohlforth, and Fareed Zakaria. Their work is sometimes referred to as **neoclassical realism**.

The realist, pessimistic view of international relations is shared by other writers, such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer. The pessimism of these **neorealists** rests on a number of key assumptions they make about the way the international system works and its inherent propensity for violence. According to the neorealist view, national security, or insecurity, is largely the result of the structure of the international system (this is why these writers are sometimes called 'structural realists'). The structure of anarchy is seen as highly durable. The implication of this is that international politics in the future is likely to be as violent as international politics in the past. In an important article entitled 'Back to the Future', John Mearsheimer (1990) argued that the end of the cold war was likely to usher in a return to the traditional multipolar **balance of power** politics of the past, in which extreme nationalism and ethnic rivalries would cause widespread instability and conflict. Mearsheimer viewed the cold war as a period of peace and stability brought about by its prevailing bipolar structure of power. With the collapse of this system, he argued, there would be a return to the kind of great power rivalries that had blighted international relations since the seventeenth century.

For neorealist writers such as Mearsheimer, international politics may not be characterized by constant wars, but nevertheless a relentless security competition takes place, with war always a possibility. They accept that cooperation among states can and does occur, but such cooperation has its limits. It is 'constrained by the dominating logic of security competition, which no amount of co-operation can eliminate' (Mearsheimer 1994/5: 9). Genuine long-lasting peace, or a world in which states do not compete for power, therefore, is very unlikely to be achieved. Neorealists predicted that the post-cold war unipolar structure of power, with US pre-eminence, was likely to give way to a new international structure with the rise of states such as China, India, and Brazil.

Liberal institutionalism

One of the main characteristics of the neorealist approach to international security is the belief that international institutions do not have a very important part to play in the prevention of war. Institutions are seen as the product of state interests and the constraints imposed by the international system itself. It is these interests and constraints that shape states' decisions about whether to cooperate or compete, rather than the institutions to which they belong. Neorealists point to the contemporary problems faced by a number of international institutions (such as the UN and EU) to reinforce their view.

Both statespeople and a number of International Relations specialists challenge these neorealist views on institutions. For example, former British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd made the case in June 1992 that institutions themselves had played a crucial role in enhancing security, particularly in Europe. He argued that the West had developed 'a set of international institutions which have proved their worth for one set of problems'. He went on to argue that the great challenge of the post-cold war era was to adapt these institutions to deal with the new circumstances that prevailed (Hurd, quoted in Mearsheimer 1994/5).

Hurd's view reflected a belief, widely shared among Western statespeople, that a framework of complementary, mutually reinforcing institutions—the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Western European Union (WEU), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)—could be developed to promote a more durable and stable European security system. This view is also shared by a distinctive group of academic writers that has developed since the 1980s and early 1990s. These writers share a conviction that the developing pattern of institutionalized cooperation among states opens up unprecedented opportunities to achieve greater international security in the years ahead. Although the past may have been characterized by constant wars and conflict, important changes were taking place in international relations, they argued, creating the opportunity to mitigate the traditional security competition between states.

This approach, known as liberal institutionalism or neoliberalism, operates largely within the realist framework, but argues that international institutions are much more important in helping to achieve cooperation and stability than 'structural realists' realize (**see Ch. 8**). According to Keohane

and Martin (1995: 42), 'institutions can provide information, reduce transaction costs, make commitments more credible, establish focal points for coordination and, in general, facilitate the operation of reciprocity'. Supporters of these ideas point to the importance of European economic and political institutions in overcoming the traditional hostility among European states.

Liberal institutionalist writers suggest that in a world constrained by state power and divergent interests, international institutions operating on the basis of reciprocity will at least be a component of any lasting peace. In other words, international institutions themselves are unlikely to eradicate war from the international system, but they can play a part in helping to achieve greater cooperation among states.

Key Points

- Realists and neorealists emphasize the perennial problem of insecurity.
- Some writers see the 'security dilemma' as the essential source of conflict among states.
- Neorealists reject the significance of international institutions in helping many states to achieve peace and security.
- In contrast, contemporary politicians and academics who write under the label of liberal institutionalism or neoliberalism see institutions as an important mechanism for achieving international security.
- Liberal institutionalists accept many of realism's assumptions about the continuing importance of military power in international relations, but argue that institutions can provide a framework for cooperation that can help to mitigate the dangers of security competition among states.

Alternative approaches

Constructivist theory

Another group of writers who describe themselves as 'constructivist theorists' posit that international relations are affected not only by power politics but also by ideas and identities. According to this view, the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material. This leads social constructivists to argue that changes in the nature of social interaction among states can bring a fundamental shift towards greater international security (**see Ch. 12**).

At one level, many constructivists, such as Alexander Wendt, share a number of the major realist assumptions about international politics. For example, some accept that states are the key referent in the study of international politics and international security; that international politics is anarchic; that states often have offensive capabilities; that states cannot be absolutely certain of the intentions of other states; that states have a fundamental wish to survive; and that states attempt to behave rationally. Some, such as Wendt, also see themselves as structuralists; that is, they believe that the interests of individual states are, in an important sense, constructed by the structure of the international system.

However, constructivists think about international politics in a very different way from neorealists. The latter tend to view structure as comprising only a distribution of material capabilities. Constructivists view structure as the product of social relationships. Social structures are made possible by shared understandings, expectations, and knowledge. For example, Wendt argues that the security dilemma is a social structure composed of inter-subjective understandings in which states are so distrustful that they make worst-case assumptions about each other's intentions and as a result define their interests in 'self-help' terms. In contrast, a **security community** (such as NATO) is a rather different social structure, composed of shared knowledge and identity in which states trust one another to resolve disputes without war (**see Box 15.2**).

Emphasis on the structure of shared knowledge is important in constructivist thinking. Social structures include material things, such as tanks and economic resources, but these acquire meaning only through

Box 15.2 The security community

A security community is a group of people which has become 'integrated'. By integration we mean the attainment, within a territory, of a 'sense of community' and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure … dependable expectations of 'peaceful change' among its population. By a 'sense of community' we mean a belief … that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of 'peaceful change'.

(Karl Deutsch)

Security regimes occur when a group of states co-operate to manage their disputes and avoid war by seeking to mute the security dilemma both by their own actions and by their assumptions about the behaviour of others.

(Robert Jervis)