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The Ethics & Causes of War
Introduction:

As the age of human on the earth is long, the issues of peace and violence are too. And since that eternity, each of peace and violence sets on a side in a seesaw board, where there is a morally need to remove the weights from the peace side by eliminating violent intentions and neglecting armed aggressive militarized acts; so the uprising of war threats would suppressed on the board of world security.

The following brief in the topic of war is divided into three parts in this paper. With the beginning, a base of ethics is mentioned in purpose to illustrate the approaches in thinking and attitudes towards war. Therefore, the first part titled “three traditional approaches to ethics” is a summery for each approach: realism, just war, and pacifism.

Then, the second part is a trail to concentrate on the complex causes of war, which are classified in this paper upon three dimensions: Individuals, State, and Anarchy in the international system. This classification is adapting the respectful theory of Kenneth Waltz about causes of war, which is well known by its three levels of analysis (Man, State, and the International System). While, the individual dimension is identifying the main psychological characteristics which are responsible of the pro-violence and war aspects and attitudes; in the state dimension two causes where covered: the internal instability and the military tends in a state. Hence, the anarchy represents the central argument in the international system level of Waltz’s theory; the third dimension in this paper clearly defines the anarchy in international system as a cause of war, and tries to answer questions as: how is the international system anarchical? And, why?

Whereas, the third part of this brief to ethics and causes of war raises two issues in regard to the war study field, in purpose to clarify many claims that are usually argued in both of the selected issues: Democracy, and Human intervention & Civilian protection.

Finally, the conclusion concerns about the key cause of wars and the responsible conductor of blowing it among the history of human beings; who is the human him/herself.
The Three Traditional Approaches to the Ethics of War

(1) **Realism**

Realism in regard to war often goes hand in hand with realism about international relations. While, realism in regard to international relations views that there are no ethical relations between states and, likewise, there are no ethical relations between human beings as such. Realism in regard to war claims that states can declare war as and when it suits their interests regardless of having a just cause (though claiming to have a just cause may be part of the strategy) and that war can be fought in any way that achieve the advantage of the fighting state (though exercising some restraint in some circumstances for prudential reasons).

But this parallel might not be accepted. Someone could be a realist about the occasions of war that is justifiable for a state to go to war to secure its advantage, but not be a realist in regard to international relations generally. So this position is not a full realism in international relations but a rather weakly supported international morality combined with realism in regard to the occasions of war.

(2) **Just war**

Two branches of just war tradition are presented as:

1. *Ius ad bellum*: the rightness/justice (*ius*) of waging war or going to war;
2. *Ius in bello*: the rightness of the manner in which one conducts the war (whom you attack; what weapons are used, and so on)

A number of elements of *ius ad bellum* are usually identified, such as a war needing to be declared by a legitimate authority, that there is a just cause such as self-defense, that going to war is a last resort, and that there is a reasonable prospect of success and proportionality.
What are the issues raised by *ius in bello*? This relates to the manner in which war is waged. The principles of the reasonable prospect of success and proportionality also operate here with regard to particular operations. Perhaps the most significant element is the limitation on who may be a direct object of attack. So, generally only combatants may be aimed at, and it is wrong to kill civilians or indeed soldiers once they have surrendered, become disarmed or become prisoners.

There is a wide variety of justifications that can be given for these just war positions. As Nigel Dowel noted “These range over approaches such as utilitarianism, natural law, conventionalism, tradition, collective prudence, human rights, and so on”.  

(3) **Pacifism**

The third main traditional approach is pacifism. According to the pacifist, it is wrong to fight in wars. It is presented as a general claim about what others should do, while sometimes as a purely personal commitment. So, apart from the general irrespective of consequences of fighting; Pacifism may be grounded on the general rejection of all killing at least of human beings. Moreover, pacifists claim that the consequences of not fighting in wars are generally better than the consequences of fighting in wars. Pacifism’s motivation may be religious or it may be secular.

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1 Nigel Dowed, *The Ethics of War and Peace*, (Polity Press, 2009)
The Causes of War

INDIVIDUALS

As a Cause of War

When Einstein sent to Sigmund Freud in regard to the scientific/intellectual effort to prevent establishing wars, it reflected the belief that human instincts may cause, and be responsible for, violence/war. As Freud noticed that human “lust for hatred and destruction” which called “death instinct” and such an instinct the civilization plays the role to overlap it into life instinct. But what are the correlates that could encourage the above instinct and drive to war?²

Social psychologists advocate that frustration is the key to human-aggression/violence. Which could be explained by saying that violence is occurred usually in response to a frustration of activity directed toward the satisfaction of strongly desired objective, such objective could vary from one’s family security or standard of living to the peace and security of the status qua.

Individuals as a cause within the situation of war/violence is refer to the state’s leader. Leader’s characteristics and psychological defects had been well noticed in the history of humans with wars and conflicts.

In this regard, two concepts are better to be highlighted:

1) The Narcissist Leader, who seeks solace from self-doubt in evidence that others are unworthy or evil, and has the desire to see them as weak, failure, and losers— even in active efforts to put others down and, at the extreme, to destroy them.
2) The Alienated Leader, who is separated, in psychological sense, from their fellow human beings and as irrationally driven to avenge their terrible loneliness and

feelings of impotence through acts of destructions. Seyom Brown noted that “the alienated are ready candidates for recruitment into violent communal and nationalist organizations”.

Also, as individual cause of war, there are two main crucial mistakes conducted by decision-makers/taker in a state, which are:

(a) Misperception: the failure to obtain crucial information on the intentions and capabilities of the adversary and other parties that could help either side.
(b) Miscalculation: the failure to predict correctly the effects of the actions of the relevant parties upon one another, a failure sometimes directly traceable to misinformation but possibly also the product of the concepts and theories by which one processes information.

And it is worthy to mention, that these mistakes are conducted, as easily as dangerously, under stress and fatigued, when the national leaders and decision makers could misperceive information and miscalculate consequences within international crisis.

STATE

As a Cause of War

The Domestic/Internal instability

Interestingly, it was noted by Bruce Russett that “domestic political unrest, whether or not stemming from economic deprivation, often results in involvement in militarized disputes”

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Although, there is doubt that an instable state, suffering from her internal instability and problems, will be able to allocate resources to establish a war; the case of domestic/internal instability in a state is considered as a cause for the state to be aggression and involved in a war. But, in a carefully formulated passage, Arno Mayer synthesizes these two incompatible scenarios when he concludes that “the calculus of the internal politics effects of intensified external conflict or war is more likely either to deter or to encourage recourse to war in revolutionary era and under conditions of internal instability than in times of domestic and international equipoise”\(^5\)

Also, such a case of internal instability is considered as an attractive situation for other state to intervene in the weakened/instable state, which might be a neighboring state.

**Military Tend / Arm-Race**

Michael Wallace, who is well known by his investigation into the statistical association between arms race and wars, concludes that “rapid competitive military growth is strongly associated with the escalation of military confrontations into war”.\(^6\) Also, John Vasques adds to Wallace’s conclusion that military build-up do appear to make it more likely that a serious dispute will escalate to war, but only in certain circumstances.

In the term of the arm, an imbalance conflict could be easily escalated into a war that will be launched by the superior armed state to enforce her objectives/interests. India’s war against Pakistan in 1971 in purpose to back the separatists’ aspirations of East Pakistan and weaken, her historical opponent, Pakistan, so India succeeded by establishing Bangladesh.

Also, such an opponent state would establish a war if she fears from other state’s efforts in developing her military capabilities in threaten trends. Israel was led by this aim

when she launched an air strike against the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, and again but against, the suspected, Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007.

In contrast, it is better to invoke the cold war era, when the competitive arm-race between the two superpowers (USA & former USSR) reached the highest level and a possible for major destructive war could be quickly escalated, but both of the superpowers did not declare a war or fight directly against each other, so the competitive arming can sometimes help prevent war, especially if the military capabilities of the opponents in an international conflict are balanced enough to reduce threats of aggression.

However, the huge developments in weapons technology, which give weapons massive destructive power; modern nation states face more difficulties reduce her tends to go to war, because of:

1. The needs to widespread nation’s support, which is not easy to succeed,
2. The fact that, the state’s soldiers are her citizens, so no need to sacrifice if no vital national interests are threatened.

Moreover, national interest of a state is reflected on her military tend. In this concept, State would adopt her military power as a tool to achieve national interests such as economic resources to justify her establishment of a war as she used to adopt it, as a norm, to protect the integrity of her territories.

**ANARCHY in the International System**

**As a Cause of War**

Anarchy refers to the fact that there is nothing in the international system to prevent war. The League of Nations failed to prevent WWI and WWII, and the United Nations is not a perfectly effective anti-war/peace device.
Within the anarchy in international system, wars are provoked to maintain or change current distribution of power within states/pacts, and to prevent any defect to the power balance/imbalance against their vital national interests.

Unfortunately, there is no efficient system in the international scheme that could have the enough enforcement power that would repress and control arm threats or conflicts. Although, the nation states, generally, consensus about the International Law which, theoretically, is considered as the legal frame of the states relations, but even though, that law is weak enough hence the world still live in a scene of arm threats, military strikes, and even military invasion. The unstable international scene is a result of the insufficient International Law, which does not have the power of enforcement. Such a power could give the International Law the proper respect and strength, so no states would be seen fearless to neglect the powerful law anymore –hopefully–.

But, why doesn’t the world have such a powerful device till now? Hidemi Suganami answered that “we know that an institutional device such as collective security would not work unless supported by a human well to make it work, and that well is not always present”.7

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**In Regard to War**

**Democracy**

The philosopher Immanuel Kant argued in the year 1795 that “republican governments would be unlikely to initiate war, since ordinary citizens do not want to disrupt their lives to fight or to pay the costs of fighting and repairing the devastation that war leaves behind”. So, a belief among main scholars in international relations that democracies never fight wars against each other. And the American politicians used to

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explain their duty of promoting democracy abroad upon their statement that no two democracies had ever gone to war each other.8

But, there is no significant correlation between non-involvement in wars and the democratic modern nation states in the world. And the modern history, in regard to international relations, shows us that both democratic and non-democratic states are conducting violence and war; whenever it would sustain their interests no matter the costs and sometimes, in the case of democratic states, however the less support they gain from their citizens to the act of violence.

Moreover, democratic system in a state could be an element that enriches the motives of conducting or involving in war, whenever the demand of war is advocated by the powerful/influential interest groups such as weapons-manufacturers/services industry. Those motives could be also powered by strategic demands whether economic or political. In another words, the “politics of international economics” would define the motives of democratic/developed states to be involved in a war or to use force.

Nevertheless, a serious caution was noted by Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder in their article “Democratization and War” based on their statistical analysis which relied on the classification of regimes and wars from 1811 to 1980. Upon their view of democratization as gradual process, rather than a sudden change; they test whether a transition toward democracy is associated with the subsequent onset of war, and the results show that “democratizing states were more likely to fight wars than were states that has undergone no change in regime”. Moreover, both of the mentioned scholars claimed in their article that “statistical evidence covering the past two centuries show that in this transitional phase of democratization, countries become more aggression and war-prone, not less, and they do fight wars with democratic states”. So, they warned in their article that “pushing nuclear-armed great powers like Russia or China toward

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democratization is like spinning a roulette wheel: many of the outcomes are undesirable”.

**Human Intervention and Civilian Protection**

In this regard to war, it is better to raise this topic because there is a need to warn about the arguments and efforts that aim to step aside the United Nations Charter to broader principles of international law such as international humanitarian law that might justify the use of force. The danger of such arguments is that they weaken the international limitation and prohibition on the use of force, which is the centerpiece of the international legal order, because the source of that prohibition is the UN Charter, and such weakening would entail unfortunate consequences. The Charter would become less effective as a legal document that governs the use of military force in international law. And this weakening of the Charter would not be limited or purposed to only the cases of humanitarian intervention. What will happen is once the Charter and the international system are weakened all related situations will be effected, including cases of less justifiable use of force, such as brute aggression. It should be expected that once people start arguing that Article 51 is not the appropriate “sole” standard for justifying the use of force, the door is opened for all kinds of arguments about the use of force.

Moreover, one of the most dangerous arguments -opening door- is the demand to modify the international law in the sake of the national interest of a state, at the expense of the civilians. So the limitation which is forced by the international law to criminalize targeting the civilians in wars even if there is number of combatants among them. This demand claims that the current international is unable to adapt the new ways of modern war. Moreover, a scholar as Michael L. Gross believes that the laws of war must change to meet states' needs, as long as, “the problem is not that the rules inadequately protect civilians but that they provide too much protection for non-state armed groups in this new

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type of war, on the mistaken assumption that civilians are always innocent bystanders”. He also assumed that “many civilians in modern wars are agents and not just bystanders … they aid and abet insurgents by storing their weapons, producing their propaganda, providing them with food and shelter, and even agreeing to act as civilian shields”.\textsuperscript{10}

Awareness would better to be raised about the importance of how rigid should be the international law which relates to the civilians’ protection in wars. No door should be opened to favor the states’ interests over civilians’ rights in such situations.

**Conclusion:**

In short, the inherited culture of violence, in both international and national dimensions, would continue to play a large role in disposing countries to resort to threats or the use of force in prosecuting their international conflicts.

But, just as there are many complicated and interrupted causes of war, there are many approaches and attitudes to succeed peace and maintain it in the world. We should no longer overstep the moral considerations while handling conflicts within the international security scheme. And even though, culture of war is still exercising great weight in world affairs, a crucial determinant of whether a particular conflict will be managed violently or nonviolently is relied on the part of the government involved which is the quality of diplomacy.

While individuals play key role in leading their states to the fields of wars, the psychological characteristics of such individuals should be monitored to prevent the society from them. Actually, the existence of ethnic hostility won’t turn into an armed conflict if there is no political intention behind it. And even the fight over economic resources is no more than politician’s decision. So, individuals are the key responsible cause of wars. Therefore, occupying the influential positions as decisions makers or

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{George P Fletcher & Jens David Ohlin, “Defending Humanity: when force is justified and why?” (OXFORD University Press, 2008)}
taker, national security advisors, foreign and defense ministers, and even diplomats by anti-peace individuals should be controlled and even eliminated.

Concepts of peace and non-violence culture need to be spread among the elites in every society. The ideal norms and morals regarding humanity and peace among nations all around the world should be revived respectfully. Because, as the slogan of the National Rifle Association in United States coined: “Guns don’t kill people; people kill people”.

References:


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