War through a Temporal Lens

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For those focused on questions of security, war poses a paradox. On one hand, the concept of war seems obvious and intuitive. It operates as the organising concept around which contemporary security discourse positions itself. Whether one views the category of security in broad or narrow terms, war, armed conflict, and political violence remain solidly within the frame (Lipschutz 1995). Simultaneously, however, there always seems to be an increasing awareness of how the nature of war itself is changing and shifting.[1] Great power wars and state-state conflicts over control of territory as traditionally understood no longer dominate the international space. Drone strikes, irregular warfare, insurgencies, terrorism, as well as massacres, genocide, peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions occupy increasingly central positions in contemporary security studies (see e.g., Boon and Lovelace 2012, Gleditsch 2013). The idea of war seems to be shifting beneath our feet and the concept itself seems difficult if not impossible to pin down in terms of meaning. The paradox this poses is that despite the ever-present gap between the lived, present-day experience of political violence and its dominant representation as 'war', this concept *still* retains meaning in theory and practice. Much like terrorism, the concept of war remains nearly impossible to define with any certainty or consensus, yet it still remains resonant and foundational in the field of IR (Cronin 2009). The questions this raises are not merely academic. In Balibar's assessment of the war on terrorism he states:

It seems to me that many, if not all, of the current discussions are in fact obscured and affected by the…preliminary question which remains undecided throughout…when it comes to either drawing lessons from the war, or deriving consequences, or proposing alternatives, is embarrassing for any speaker, namely, the simple question:*what is a "war"?* I shall try to show that this is not a verbal puzzle, a pure nominalistic requisite, that it has consequences for our reasoning concerning the current situation, and the kind of historical determinations that it reveals (Balibar 2008, 366).

The question of whether or not the United States is at war with the Islamic State, for instance, has significant impact on US behaviour and foreign policy. A debate has recently emerged within the United States regarding the necessity of a congressional resolution authorising the use of military force (AUMF) for the ongoing US military operations in Iraq and Syria. An AUMF is the modern American instantiation of an official declaration of war, and as such, it triggers a comprehensive legal shift throughout US policy. The Obama administration claims that they do not need authorisation on the basis of the 2001 AUMF authorising the war on terrorism and more recently narrowed by the Administration to the war on 'Al Qaeda and its affiliates' (US National Security Strategy 2010). At this point, however, the debate has largely been left behind as it has become clear that no new AUMF can be agreed upon (Leatherby 2015). This has left the administration position in place by default—military operations can continue against the Islamic State, as well as against Al Qaeda and whoever else the Administration decides constitutes 'its affiliate'.

The seemingly simple question—whether the United States is engaged in a war with the Islamic State—is a question that cannot be answered with finality at the moment and is now seen as a legal issue, but the conceptual implications

War through a Temporal Lens

Written by Christopher McIntosh

involved in answering the question are much broader, just as Balibar argued was the case with the initiation of the war on terrorism. Answering this question with any precision goes well beyond the narrow issue of legal declarations of war. Two puzzles arise at the conceptual level that this chapter will explore. First, there is the question of how past, present, and future operate in the practice of war itself—e.g., temporal horizons that appear obvious in retrospect are very much not so in the moment. Second, at the analytical level, the beginning and endings of war operate in a much more indeterminate manner than typically understood, especially in the study of IR.

International relations (IR) has a conception of war that tracks largely to societal discourses where war is viewed as involving the use of violence between organised groups for ostensibly political purposes (Sambanis 2004; Harff 2003). What's equally important to the behaviour the concept represents is the level of casualty and magnitude of destruction. We may disagree on the level at which a conflict becomes more than just a skirmish or battle, but we can all agree, for instance, that a war is different than an assassination. Regardless of where we draw that line, assessing whether a given conflict has crossed it cannot be known in advance. In other words, as a category of analysis, a war only becomes a war after the fact. Balibar captures this directly when he states:

Wars are named: they have to be. Most of the time they are named after the event, by historians, which means in particular that they are named when they are considered to be finished, to have been brought to an end… They are named individually or collectively, e.g., the Wars of the Roses, or the Punic Wars, the Napoleonic Wars. But often they are not named univocally (Balibar 2008; 367).

A shooting at Fort Hood inspired by a terrorist group's propaganda or the state execution of an individual identified as conspiring with that group are indeed acts of violence between groups in conflict, but *alone* neither are sufficient to constitute a war. That designation or 'naming', to use Balibar's term, only arises with certainty in the future. War then seems to operate in a continuing space of temporal liminality where it is both outside and beyond our apprehension in the present, yet simultaneously meaningful in context and seemingly appreciable, even obvious.

IR has seen recent movement towards recognising the importance of temporality in all facets of international political practice by foregrounding it as a stand-alone issue, rather than as an issue of history or methodology (Hom 2010, Hom and Steele 2010, McIntosh 2015, Solomon 2013, Hutchings 2008, Hutchings 2007, Berenskoetter 2011, Stevens 2016). This chapter seeks to build upon these moves by illustrating some of the ways in which attention to the temporal dimension in IR can better inform the understanding of a foundational concept such as war. As with any move to incorporate more 'social' aspects of political experience, moves to foreground temporality run into the criticism that these issues wash out when engaging 'harder' issues such as war and the use of force (Mearsheimer 1995, Wendt 1995). This chapter uses a temporal frame to sketch out some of the important aspects of the concept of war as it is produced and reproduced in IR scholarship and practice. In doing so it also operates as an illustration of what can be illuminated by utilising it as a frame (Butler 2009). Wars are relational—both in terms of space and time—and rely on connections in order to come into existence (Jackson and Nexon 1999). As a concept that is already understood as an event—rather than a thing—war is necessarily produced through processes and relations over time and only comes to be understood through these representation(s). Events are difficult to pin down ontologically, yet most accept that they are distinct from things. MacKenzie identifies this distinction, drawing on Davidson, by emphasising that events are distinct due to the action that is intrinsic to the concept—e.g., 'passing legislation' is an event that may be captured by the word 'legislation' but is not synonymous with the abstract and fixed idea of a 'law' (MacKenzie 2008).[2]

This chapter will proceed in two parts. First, it sketches out some important aspects of war that are more clearly exposed when confronted from a temporal perspective. Framing war as constituted first and foremost temporally, rather than as an entity or outcome to be explained and/or understood emphasises the importance of process, discontinuity, transformation, and duration (Buzan and Lawson 2012, Musgrave and Nexon 2013). The second section identifies some of the implications for future security studies scholarship if war is 'fully temporalized' and understood as a dynamic process. Reflexive criticism becomes increasingly important, as the concept of war is susceptible to reification by the very theorists who are seeking to better understand it. To accept the portrayed representations by political actors as real is to leave a critical element of political violence uninterrogated (Butler 2004, Butler 2012). As well, the concept of war should be more fully critiqued and provisionally understood as a

War through a Temporal Lens
Written by Christopher McIntosh

category that captures multiple, disparate types of political violence. As such, it may—or may not—remain useful as time goes on.

Identifying War's Constitutive Temporal Dimension

In IR, war is typically treated as an outcome to be explained or predicted. Do arms races precede conflicts? Are great power wars more or less likely during times of transition? Is expansionism still a meaningful motivation for conflict initiation? In political practice, actors that consider themselves in an area of peace see it as something to avoid, an undesirable outcome, or evidence that the systems in places to prevent it have either failed or been insufficient (Bialasiewicz and Campbell et al 2007). Regardless of how one chooses to understand or characterise it, however, war is an event. Like any event, and as Balibar argues, it is understood to have a beginning and an end. This section will address this constitutive dimension in three parts—the past, present, and future. While analytically I make this separation to show how the two puzzles operate in a more appreciable manner, it is *not* the case that there is a neat separation. Past, present, and future are each constituted by the other due to the interpenetration of past and present, present and future, as well as past and future—the separation I use here is purely heuristic.

War's (of the) Past

When considering events in social and/or political terms, temporality and temporal dynamics are especially important—historical sociologists like William Sewell, for instance argue that viewing historical events (like wars) in context requires a recognition that temporal relationships are much more complicated, non-linear, and dynamic than we may otherwise appreciate (Sewell 1996, Abbott 2001). Three aspects are particularly important. First, events and their causes are constituted by indeterminacy. To declare a war was 'caused' by single or even multiple factors requires an elimination of the contingency inherent to any historical event. Each historical event is made up of thousands of actors interacting many times over—the complexity involved is dramatic and deep as Becker observed many years ago in articulating his notion of a 'historical fact' (Becker 1955). Second, events are represented in the future—the Great War only becomes World War I after the fact and only even becomes 'Great' after enough time has concluded for that adjective to apply. Lundborg's work on Deleuze and the 'pure event' in the context of '9/11' demonstrates that events are constituted by the constant interplay between past and future—overlapping, unfolding, and constantly interpreted and re-interpreted in the ongoing present (Lundborg 2012, Hutchings 2008). Third, the temporal dynamics of events reinforce the susceptibility of broad structures to transformation—these transformations can be slow and linear, but equally so they can be quick and abrupt. Given that international institutions are constituted relationally by interactions that produce and reproduce these institutions, international political practice would seem especially susceptible to these. In the context of war, given Clausewitz' observation regarding the inevitability of 'friction', this only seems to be an even more important factor (Clausewitz 1984).

Wars, then, are discursively produced as events with a beginning and an end, possessing temporal boundaries that are articulated as discrete and knowable. Mary Dudziak writes, 'war…has temporal boundaries on both sides' (Dudziak 2012). Despite this, the indeterminacy and contingency Sewell and others speak to manifests particularly when one seeks to precisely articulate this event's boundaries. In the context of war, this occurs when looking to identify a war's originary moment. Take the example of the war on terrorism (Jarvis 2008). Most would place the beginning date of the war as 14 September 2001—the date Congress passed the AUMF. Some might argue that the Bush address the night of the attacks claiming that the United States would 'win the war against terrorism' constituted its beginning. Regardless of the precise moment, almost no IR scholar or political official would argue it began at any point *before* 11 September 2001 (Bush 2001). What is odd about this is that the adversary had already declared war on the United States many years before and the United States had even responded to these past threats with military operations. Shultz and Vogt argue that this exposed conceptual issues, not merely bureaucratic ones.

Beyond the refusal of the US intelligence community, and for that matter the military establishment, to classify terrorism as warfare because it was not a serious enough danger, other reasons also contributed to this reluctance. Most important, terrorism was not war because it did not resemble modern war as the spooks and soldiers had known it, studied it and practiced it. Therefore, ipso facto, it could not be war (Shultz and Vogt 2003).

War through a Temporal Lens

Written by Christopher McIntosh

What appears a seemingly simple question—when did the war on terrorism begin—is one fraught by perspective and temporal framing. Recognising Al Qaeda's declaration of war on the United States as the start of the conflict confers upon them a legitimacy that many would be uncomfortable with, but from the perspective of the IR scholar, that discomfort should be irrelevant. To act otherwise is to privilege one actor's viewpoint over the other in their analysis of what appears to be an objective fact—the beginning of the war on terrorism.

Some of this depends upon perspective. From the perspective of the IR scholar, the concept of war is important as a way of categorising an event in order to explain and/or understand it. In other words, IR scholars can wait until the war has concluded and is unquestionably a war due to the duration, magnitude, actors involved, etc. These are all things best assessed in the future with the benefit of hindsight. In practice, however, it is vastly different, as wars are declared (and fought) in a forward-looking manner. But even for the practitioner, the interpenetration of the present and future are at play. A declaration of war in the present, for instance, also operates as an articulation of a particular future. It is a future where there is a claimed willingness to engage in actions that would constitute a war, even if they have not as of yet actually happened. Without that future informing the declaration in the present, the present declaration will not be understood as an actual war. Congress authorising war, for instance, articulates a set of futures that would constitute a war should they come to pass—a commitment to ongoing battles, acceptable levels of casualties, massive resource commitments, and a willingness to use force against the enemy. My declaration of 'war' on the spider occupying an unreachable corner of my office, does not, and is therefore appropriately not considered the beginning of an actual conflict.

The United States' current actions against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq express a similar indeterminacy. If we consider the current actions to be a war—even if ultimately it remains solely an aerial campaign[3]—when exactly would we describe the campaign as beginning? Equally complicated, what will we be saying it even *is* years from now? And if these 'names' change, then how does one act differently and how do our understandings and theories shift? For instance, future historians could read the past decade and a half of US military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Syria (as well as Yemen) as part of one broader war rather than separate wars. One could even imagine it being understood as a third world war or the beginning of a new cold war as some—admittedly ideologically motivated—have already done.[4] Equally so, historians might take the view that each of these 'contingency operations' are individual conflicts connected in some ways, but not constituting one continuous event. Legally, the picture remains murky as the US is currently justifying its operations in Iraq and Syria as part of a broader fight against Al Qaeda's affiliates even as it asks for congressional authorization specific to this campaign. All this has occurred even while acknowledging that the Islamic State has publicly split with Al Qaeda and is no longer an affiliate.

War's Present

How the future reads our current present could have significant implications for conceptions of IR going forward and how future scholars and observers interpret the actions of those in the present. Future events have the potential to radically re-shape the understanding of present political practices. If the nuclear deal with Iran fails—as many in the US Congress are hoping—and results in an eventual military campaign against an Iranian nuclear programme—which a startling number of politicians are also hoping for—present day events could look very different to scholars of the future, even though nothing has actually changed. Dick Cheney, for one, is already linking the 2003 invasion of Iraq to the effort to eliminate Iran's nuclear programme, a position that could seem more reasonable if the US were to eventually begin a military conflict with Iran (Carter 2015). Under that scenario, it would become much easier to conceptualise the broad sweep of these events as part of one larger narrative. Previous operations throughout the region could be conceptualised as the beginning of one broader fight against Iranian-backed fighters or as the emergence of a Shia-Sunni conflict. Some parts of the American political scene already seem to believe this is happening (see e.g., Jamie Dettmer 2015). But again, much of this depends almost entirely upon where one locates the origin of the war—regardless of which war we are speaking about.

Separately, if these conflicts are seen as part of one broader campaign (a position the US is admittedly unclear upon) and they are also accepted by future scholars as prompted by the 2001 terrorist attacks, one could easily imagine literature comparing the causes of world wars I and II or Vietnam to the causes of this war given the time the war has

War through a Temporal Lens

Written by Christopher McIntosh

taken as well as its (potential) scope. One can imagine under that scenario that the attack on Archduke Ferdinand becoming more broadly understood as a terrorist attack, prompting comparisons to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001. Audrey Cronin, for instance, has already asserted this comparison (Cronin 2009). Alternatively, if it is portrayed as a Sunni-Shia conflict as some argue, it could be compared to the Cold War where two entities are in conflict but refuse direct engagement except via 'proxy wars' (e.g., Yemen) or covert operations supporting rebels (Syria). All that said, it's also possible that each conflict could continue to be understood as completely separate where the US invasion and occupation of Iraq is a single conflict, as was the war in Afghanistan, and as are operations in Syria/Northern Iraq, each possessing their own causes and effects.

How one resolves these issues depends on a variety of concerns including ideology, data interpretation, historiography, and viewpoint and my intention is not to preemptively resolve the inevitable historical debate. But viewing the temporal aspects of this issue exposes two issues. First and foremost, present-based analysis of the conflict occupies a liminal space where the future and past are interpenetrated but contingent. If we believe the conflict is going to end soon our understanding of what it is that we are explaining and/or understanding perhaps goes in one direction, but if we assume the conflict's endpoint is in the distant future, it may be quite another. This leads me to the second point: this is not merely of concern for the scholars seeking to refine the analytic category of war in post-conflict theorisation, but it also shapes the actions of practitioners in the moment. This distinction is an important one, but not limited to this particular context, because the temporal experience of the observed almost necessarily differs from that of the observer. Bourdieu identifies this as a 'de-temporalising' move where

Scientific practice is so 'detemporalized' that it tends to exclude even the idea of what it excludes: because science is possible only in a relation to time which opposed to that of practice, it tends to ignore time and, in doing so, to reify practices…The detemporalizing effect (visible in the synoptic apprehension that diagrams make possible) that science produces when it forgets the transformation it imposes on practices inscribed in the current of time, i.e. detotalized, simply by totalizing them, is never more pernicious than when exerted on practices defined by the fact that their temporal structure, direction, and rhythm are *constitutive* of their meaning (Bourdieu 1977).

The observation Bourdieu makes here is an important one, precisely because the shift in level of analysis from practitioner to scholar is one that intrinsically creates this 'detemporalising' effect. One can see this when approaching the near-past and present of US foreign policy regarding the 'war on terrorism' as broadly understood. Actions like the surge in Iraq or Afghanistan are articulated as a means of building up indigenous capacity so as to better enable a drawdown of US forces, but when read against the backdrop of a decade and a half with more engagement than not, they can appear as something else entirely—escalation rather than a de-escalatory move. Similarly, ideas like the Obama administration's claim that the United States has 'pulled out of Iraq' at one point seemed quite viable, but given the current conflict and military operations in Northern Iraq and Syria the claim becomes much more complicated. From an IR perspective this complicates even basic questions of cause and effect because of the difficulty in assessing the temporal boundaries regarding when a conflict has started and when it ended (Dudziak 2012). In some ways this might point to a reason why objectivist IR largely ignores ongoing conflict and chooses to deal with the more distant past.

What we think of as the war itself—the duration or middle of the event where the actual armed conflict takes place—is also an intrinsically temporally constituted activity that requires projections into the past and/or future. A war only becomes indisputably a war after the violence reaches a level of significance commensurate with extant discursive understandings of a war. A preemptive strike on a terrorist cell by US operatives in Somalia in and of itself does not constitute a war even though it may constitute an 'act of war'. Wars are not constituted by a single act, however, but by a series of such acts understood in relation to each other. While this begs the question of how many 'acts of war' it takes to become a war—echoing the morally bankrupt distinction the Clinton administration famously made in Rwanda between 'acts of genocide' and 'genocide'—the lack of an objective answer does not mean that there are no answers accepted and defended in practice (Power 2001). Put differently, the future has a potentially defining role in conceptualising the actions of the present and past. Firing a gun across a border in and of itself does not constitute a war—even if it starts one—unless events that transpire afterwards can be read in conjunction with that act to make it so. The Great War only becomes World War I as a result of future events, but the argument here runs deeper than that. The first shot (as well as the second, third, and so forth) must be followed by other acts in

War through a Temporal Lens

Written by Christopher McIntosh

order to be understood as the 'first' shot in a war and that is something of which one can only be certain of (if ever) in the future.

The present of war, then, is temporally complicated and dense—the fog of war extends to the understanding of time and how it transpires for those in the midst of conflict. World wars do not begin as such and participants are so busy in the trenches (so to speak) that taking time out to step back and assess the situation as the historians will is unlikely and perhaps even counterproductive. The temporal present for these actors is constituted by the interplay of incomplete representations of past and future. Applied to today's events it means in the future, when seeking to explain or understand the actions of practitioners of the present, we should take on the temporally appropriate perspective and resist the determinism that comes along with the privileged viewpoint of looking backward.

War's Future

Making sense of temporal boundaries is difficult at the outset of war, but similarly complicated when identifying the end point. When evaluating how wars end, three elements of temporal dynamics complicate thinking on the causes of conflict and cooperation. First, war appears largely as a representation of the past or projection of a particular future, and is not an objectively constituted, independently verifiable entity. While terrorism has seen a great deal of investigation into the term's discursive construction and the power relations at play when identifying an act as 'terrorist' or a group as engaged in 'terrorism', there has been less of this with respect to the concept of war itself (See e.g., Cronin 2003, Hoffman 2006 and Jackson 2007).

Generally speaking, IR seems to rely on a notion of 'we know it when we see it' when it comes to identifying wars. As a result, IR's view tends to reflect the viewpoint of practitioners, particularly amongst objectivist scholars. Naming a set of actions of political violence as war—rather than a massacre, civil conflict, terrorism, or police action, for instance—reflects dominant power relations and the privileged place of sovereign states as international subjects. For the scholar of IR, analytically identifying a set of actions as a war occurs in the present and extends backwards, much as Wendt and others have argued (Wendt 1999, Berenskoetter 2011).

Second, and primarily because the notion of war itself relies upon understandings of the past and/or future, it is best understood as constituted by the intersection of both. David Weberman and Huw Price have both articulated the possibility of 'backward causation' in sociopolitical life. Weberman does this philosophically and Price from the perspective of quantum physics (Weberman 1997, Price 1996). Each ultimately identifies how events of the future can actually change things that have happened prior—physically Price sees this as theoretically possible at the quantum level and Weberman identifies how actions taken in the moment have effects later on that re-constitute the initial action as something different, such as an assassin's bullet only becoming part of the assassination itself after the victim dies. This outcome is not always co-terminous with the shot itself. Both of these analyses echo Lundborg's (2012) analysis of '9/11' to show how events become increasingly interrelated temporally the finer one's focus goes. Independent of how one resolves these issues or even whether one accepts the potential of 'backwards causation', an inevitable aspect of conceptualising a set of events as a war relies on the future to shape the understanding of the past that operates in the present. In other words, to return to the war on terrorism example, we could be in the midst of what will be known as something much bigger than 'contingency operations' (perhaps the first half of the second Thirty Years' War), but do not know it as of yet, because future events have not taken place that make it so.

This leads to the final aspect of war's temporal boundaries. Just as beginnings are reflective of the power dynamics in international discourse—the war on terrorism only begins once a state declares it so—endings are equally the product of contested interpretation. Battles continue over the end point. In the modern imaginary with its bias towards state-state conflicts as the dominant conception of war, the idea of a war ending is a simple one. Instruments of surrender are signed and both sides agree that the conflict is over through mutual declaration. Rarely, if ever, in modern warfare is an actual war concluded through the annihilation of an actor in the conflict (Reiter 2003). But as is demonstrated by the increasing popular visibility of terrorist campaigns, civil conflicts, and insurgencies, the end of the war is a moment of interpretation. If citizens of their state choose to attack the adversary post-agreement it becomes a civil matter, not an indication that the war has restarted. In the case of conflicts where states are no longer the sole actors, such as terrorist campaigns, this is especially difficult because groups could take it upon themselves

War through a Temporal Lens

Written by Christopher McIntosh

to continue the campaign even after agreements are in place that have 'ended' the conflict, as was the case in Northern Ireland, throwing wide-open the question of whether the conflict has truly 'ended' (Little 2014).

Implications for IR

Observing that temporal dynamics are at play in conceptions of war may possess some prima facia value, but what are the implications for future IR work? First, it emphasises that war is only one form of violence that exists in the international space. While this is not a particularly new argument as feminist theorists and peace studies scholars have identified the manner in which contemporary foreign policy devalues structural violence, what a temporal lens offers is another means of explaining why this is the case (Hutchings 2007, Blanchard 2003, Barash and Webel 2003). Temporal commitments regarding the understanding of war as an event with a definite beginning and end, duration and conclusion, contribute to the privileging of instantiations of violence like war and armed conflict over more diffuse, ongoing, structural forms of violence. Conceptions of war as a time-bound, discrete event make it easier to understand and distinguish as something that is important and as a problem that is potentially solvable (Cox 1981). Actions that are not temporally compressed or time-bound remain harder to appreciate or approach in the collective political imaginary.

The preceding analysis also reveals that war is not necessarily something that 'breaks out' or is 'sparked' by events, but rather a series of events and uses of force that get interpreted in the present and future present into one broader, linked event. Dominant discourses and narratives shape how we read these multiple disparate events. Given the role of sovereign states in constituting these discursive frames, it is unsurprising that war as a contemporary concept privileges state-centric notions. A narrative discursively 'makes sense' in the present what has happened in the past and allows the set of actions to be conceptualised as a war rather than something different and perhaps inevitable.

Approaching war with a temporal frame also reveals that war is a category of violence, not an objectively occurring idea. It is temporally imposed and constructed. The future and the past meet in complicated and important ways that serve to frame our understanding of it and sovereign state subjects inevitably play a large role in policing the boundaries of the event. The representation of the event also necessarily refers to that which is outside the present and therefore absent. Much like terrorist attacks operate as an idea in process, an event that is in a constant state of becoming, wars are similarly fluid in interpretation (Lundborg 2012). Legal scholars have attempted to identify the meaning of the term and can only agree on the idea that it involves violence and organised groups (O'Connell et al 2004). Critical War Studies as a school of thought has provided important insight into these understandings of war's ultimate ontology. Attention to temporality can benefit these moves and vice versa (Holmqvist 2013). In particular, if it is the case that the ontology of war is neither fixed nor objective, temporal relationships are intrinsic to these understandings. Wars are much like MacKenzie's idea of 'legislating' and the inevitable distinctions between the reified notion of war and its actual ontological foundation are distinctly about how we understand relationships across time.

A third implication that arises from turning a temporal lens on the concept of war is that it exposes the value of reflexivity specifically when approaching the concept of war. This operates at two levels. At the scholarly level, given the indeterminacy of any understanding of war itself, making comparisons becomes increasingly complicated. This necessitates a reflexive analysis of the manner in which IR treats war as a category of violence similar enough to be compared across vast periods of time and space. If war is a temporal entity that is contingent and indeterminate, however, then IR needs to ask more nuanced questions regarding its cross-temporal comparisons and its privileging of generalisability when it comes to this foundational concept. Models of IR inquiry like the Correlates of War project that use linear time to make discrete claims and mark relationships might need to be rethought, especially with respect to their conclusions. Insights based on the Thirty Years War or even Vietnam when brought into the present or future environment may be comparing apples and oranges.

This leads to the second level at which reflexivity comes in—asking the questions who the scholarship is for and what its purpose is? If IR scholarship is produced in the present and access to the present and near-future is the primary area we can influence as time-bound entities then it forces us as scholars of this discipline to take seriously the question of purpose and value in our actions (Berenskoetter 2011, Amoreux and Steele 2015). What is the value in

War through a Temporal Lens
Written by Christopher McIntosh

studying counterterrorism, for instance, if we become sceptical of the objective accumulation of time-less political claims or truths (Krause and Williams 2004, Jackson 2015, Um and Pisoiu 2015)? If political claims, ideas, and knowledge are essentially time-bound, then the question of what value the claims have for the present and near-future become much more resonant and important. One can read the moves towards forecasting and mid-level theory as an implicit reaction to this issue (Mellers et al 2015, Dunn, Hanson, and Wight 2013). By narrowing their claims and/or taking an approach that actively theorises how their model applies to particular futures—rather than relying on an assumption that adding knowledge to the world will make prediction 'better', these approaches take on a more temporally limited vision that has the potential to better capture temporal complexity in our scholarly work. If part of the goal of studying war is to better understand it so as to limit the future suffering it causes, then reflexive analysis can do important work along these lines. Valuing the constitutive temporal dynamics at play is vital to this work.

Conclusion

To bring this back to the question of war in the present, it appears that the picture regarding what is going on between the United States and various terrorist groups and regimes in the Middle East remains murky. Declaring it a single war seems inappropriate given the multiplicity of adversaries, yet treating Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria (as well as potentially Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen) as completely separate conflicts seems equally problematic. What this chapter has sought to demonstrate, however, is that this problem is not unique to present-day politics, but is intrinsic to the concept. On the eve of what would become World War II, Carl Schmitt observed

For several years now, in the most scattered parts of the Earth, sanguinary battles have been fought out while a consensus about the notion of and the term 'war' has been carefully avoided…It appears, what was always true, that the history of international law is the history of the notion of war…hence the notion of war becomes a problem the objective discussion of which is appropriate, in order to disperse the fog of deceptive fictions and allow the [emphasis added] *real* situation of *today's international law* to be recognized as such (Schmitt 1938, 1)

In some ways this captures how the currently unforeseeable future implicates the present but also the manner in which decisions in the present operate at the intersection of meaning in the past and future. What a temporal lens allows is the reintegration of the political imaginary of practitioners at the time. It functions as a tool to better interrogate and model ideas of temporality into predictions. It also reveals the temporal boundaries intrinsic to identifying particular acts of violence as occupying the privileged position of war. By revealing the temporal indeterminacy of the question Balibar asks, 'what is war?', attention to temporality opens space for similarly fundamental investigations to emerge via the de-naturalising of the conception of war itself.

Notes

[1] I recognise from the outset that this is primarily a matter of appearances and explicitly make the argument in later sections that this disjuncture between actual political practice and conceptual representation is an inescapable one, not, as some argue, a product of particular changes in contemporary warfighting.

[2] It should be noted that MacKenzie's concern is with the more specific 'political event' and does not necessarily share Davidson's ontological account of this distinction.

[3] Officially speaking this is the case, but historically the United States has employed covert operatives to assist when engaged in these types of measures.

[4] US Secretary of State John Kerry somewhat unwittingly encouraged this in comments comparing the ease of victory in the Cold War to the conflict with the Islamic State. (Sydney Morning Herald 2015)

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War through a Temporal Lens
Written by Christopher McIntosh

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