

# The Objectives of War: Glory and Justice, Advantage or Annihilation?

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The Cold war is a defining war as it ostensibly birthed a new and enhanced peaceful international system. As a result, the post-Cold War world created is depicted as a nonviolent and prosperous environment due to the culmination of fighting and the territorial expansion of liberalism. With the promotion of democracy and the rise of multilateral international institutions across nations, many predicted a change in warfare due to the evolution of arms control constraint during the Cold War or the obsolescence of war itself due to rising nuclear disarmament in the new unipolar world (Cox, 2011). While the 21st Century has not become the peaceful era many foretold, and the nature of warfare has significantly changed, the goals which actors seek to achieve or preserve continue to remain constant. According to Hans Speier (1941), three types of war exist: absolute war, instrumental war, and agnostic fighting, which are orientated respectively toward the objectives of annihilation, advantage, glory, and justice. Thus, in this essay, I argue that while the modes of warfare and actors involved have evolved in the post-Cold War world, the critical military objectives of war Speier's identified have remained the same. A critical examination of the prevalence of the annihilation and absolute war follows, followed by advantage and instrumental wars, and finally glory and justice in agnostic fighting.

### Annihilation

The first section of this essay will examine the objective of annihilation, which is the primary intention of 'absolute war'. Absolute war is waged without rules in which the absolute enemy is a symbol of 'strangeness, evil and danger to the community as a whole' (Speier, 1941:445). This lack of social homogeneity results in a war waged without a sense of mutual obligation, and instead, all available means of violence are enforced. The historical types of war in which restrictions are abandoned are those against 'barbarians, savages and infidels'. For instance, the Crusades were a series of ruthless religious wars between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages. At that time, the use of weapons in wars was prohibited among Christians, but an exception was allowed in fighting the Mohammedans, exhibiting the rejection of restrictions (Speier, 1941:446). In modern times, ideological wars fought in the name of strong political beliefs can be compared to those waged against unbelievers. For instance, the twentieth Century can be referred to as an 'age of genocide' as considering the wars in the last 100 years in which genocides have occurred, every situation has been one in which the war has provided the cover for genocide exhibiting the intention of annihilation. This has proceeded into the post-Cold war era through the Islamist uprising in Algeria 1991-2002, the war in Bosnia Herzegovina 1992-1995, and the Second Congo War 1998-2003, which all produced mass fatalities (Bartrop, 2002: 525).

However, the literature on whether absolute war may be a trend in the post-Cold War world contradicts this. While the collapse of the Cold War may have decreased the dominance of capitalist-communist identities, they have been replaced by increased religious, ethnic, or regional identities. As a result, these changes have resulted in a growth of available identities and hubs seeking to deploy them, instigating 'new wars' in the future (Maynard, 2015:42; Kaldor, 2013). According to Kaldor (2002), these 'new wars' will be fought by state and nonstate actors, and instead of seizing territory through military means, battles will be rare and violence is directed principally against civilians as a method of commanding territory rather than against adversary forces. Thus, genocidal tendencies have come to dominate contemporary war as increasingly states go to war because of uncertainty in their control over 'their'

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territory. These wars are mainly directed against civilian populations aided by technological revolutionised uses of airpower (Kaldor, 2013; Shaw, 2000).

However, in contrary to Kaldor's 'new wars' thesis, there has been a steady decrease in the number of civil wars since 1989 as economic development is increasingly dependent on intellectual capital that must be enticed rather than coerced; hence, the incentives for governments to limit conflicts is more persuading in the post-Cold War period. (Melander et al., 2009). Likewise, due to the rise of multilateral organisations and international institutions such as the United Nations and NATO, wars among powers are rarely allowed to run their natural course due to foreign intervention to prevent mass fatalities since 'the greater the humanitarian crisis generated by a conflict, the greater the pressure to meddle' (Freedman, 1998: 49). However, Luttwak (1999) argues this is problematic as it causes war to become an endemic conflict because the outside intervention blocks the transformative effects of decisive victory and exhaustion; therefore, peace cannot ensue, resulting in eventual annihilation.

Nonetheless, the increase in technological military weapons, including nuclear weapons and missile systems that have expanded the means of destruction and human cost of war, indicates that the objective of annihilation remains constant in modern warfare. Together these studies indicate that if a major war were to erupt between the nuclear powers, annihilation would undoubtedly be achieved; thus, while the modes of warfare and actors involved have changed from in the post-Cold War world, the objective of annihilation remains constant.

## **Advantage**

The second section of this essay will examine Speier's (1941) concept of instrumental wars that seek to achieve 'advantage' by attaining values that the enemy controls, most notably economic values. As a result, 'war assumes the form of robbery in which the death of the victim may constitute murder but does not mean waste' as the victor is likely to gain highly valuable strategic and economic benefits (Spier, 1941: 449). Colonial campaigns conducted by western states and the wars fought to prevent the liberation of the colonies are critical examples of instrumental war. For instance, the Battle of Plassey (1757) helped establish British imperialism over India, gaining access to the country's commodities, including Indian spices, textiles, precious stones, opium, and control over trading routes. Overall, territory has been a powerful influence on conflict throughout history as a recent reanalysis of the Correlates of War (COW) data suggests that of the 79 interstate wars between 1816 and 1997, 43 (54%) should be classified as territorial, suggesting that explicitly territorial issues are more likely to lead to war, recurring conflict, and result in high fatalities should war occur (Vasquez and Valeriano, 2010).

In the post-Cold War world, strong international concern to preserve existing state boundaries is evidence of the significant role of territoriality. The evolution of international institutions and international law to protect these boundaries has benefited many states, protecting their most critical territorial possessions and reducing the threat of predation from other states (Johnson and Toft, 2014:33). Although the territorial integrity norm is primarily a western phenomenon, interstate conflict over territory continues, from Kashmir and Israel/Palestine to the South China Sea. For instance, the Israel and Palestine conflict is one of the world's longest-running conflicts between two movements that both lay claim to the same territory in Israel since an initial United Nations proposal to distribute each group part of the land failed; thus, Israel and the encompassing Arab nations have fought several wars over the territory since (BBC, 2021).

Additionally, a considerable amount of literature has been published on future 'resource wars.' Contemporary conflicts would be categorised by a new violent scramble for resources among local warlords, regional hegemony, and international powers due to the combination of population and economic growth leading to a relentless expansion in demand for raw materials. For instance, global climate change could multiply strains on natural resources and trigger water wars, catalyse the spread of disease or induce mass migrations stimulating further armed conflicts (Klare, 2001; Victor, 2007).

However, critics argue that future resource wars are unlikely and rarely occur since resource money may magnify and prolong some conflicts as well as, the root causes of those hostilities usually lie elsewhere. Furthermore, there has been a steady decline in conquest wars since the Cold War from more than half to less than 30% (Holsti, 2010).

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Liberals assert this is due to conquest wars becoming unprofitable due to economic globalisation, such as increases in international trade, expanding overseas investment, and the high international costs since the international community condemns the use of force in all territorial disagreements, including those where political authority is ambiguous (Meierding, 2016).

Therefore, only in civil wars does the question of resources such as oil, diamonds, minerals, and territory play a significant role; this was especially true as Cold War superpowers halted their financial support to local actors. Hence, the abundance of resources, not their scarcity, fuels such conflicts, such as the current tensions between North and South Sudan over oil, which are remnants of civil war and a failed secession process, not a desire to control new resources (Tertrais, 2012:16; Meierding, 2016; 261). However, modern nationalist movements are frequently linked to concepts of territory, especially homeland, for a specific, often ethnic group; therefore, as established in the previous section, identity conflicts remain prevalent in modern society. Consequently, while instrumental wars are likely to be contained to intrastate conflicts rather than interstate, they remain prevalent; hence, the objective of advantage remains constant in the post-Cold world (Le Billon, 2007).

## **Glory and Justice**

Finally, in the last section of this essay, I will explore the prevalence of the 'agnostic fight' in which victory is a symbolic revelation of 'glory and justice' provided that shared rules and norms are meticulously respected. Violence throughout history in both inter and intrastate conflicts has been glorified and sanctified through defending national 'honour', values, and security to either maintain or alter the status quo. For instance, historical societies such as the Roman Empire, Vikings, Malorian knights, Shaolin monks, the Samurai and Zulus were built on the demand for glory achieved in a battle to prove an individual's self-worth (French, 2016). However, over time due to the construction of sovereign states and the 'humanitarian revolution' as coined by Pinker, war has no longer come to be associated with personal achievement or heroism; instead, we are experiencing 'war fatigue' (Mueller, 1989) and 'debellicization' (Mandelbaum, 2002). In developed countries from the last 20th Century, each element that built a war-friendly mentality such as nationalism, territorial ambition, an international culture of honour and indifference to human casualties has become outdated, resulting in an overall decline in global violence (Tertrais, 2012; Pinker, 2011: 283).

However, there are some specific cases in which 'glory and justice' remain prevalent. Great power states treasure their status in the international order and consider war to preserve their prestige despite the political and military consequences, as per the British intervention in the Falklands (1982) to re-establish their sovereignty. The re-conquering of the Falklands demonstrated Britain's capability to project its hard power far away and display its financial capacity to do so. As the UK's reputation was stained from its failure in the 1956 Suez Crisis, a victory in the Falklands would be considered an astonishing achievement and restore the image of a strong and victorious United Kingdom, thus achieving merited glory and justice (Grandpierron, 2017).

Despite this, the post-Cold War era has seen frequent military expeditions to be authorised on humanitarian concerns to 'preserve the peace'; the 21st Century is now witnessing a legitimisation of warfare where it has become the weapon of choice for powerful state actors. The 'War on Terror' initiated by the Bush administration in 2001 illustrates this clearly. From the beginning, the war was presented as a legally acceptable act of self-defence that adhered to the 'just war' principles; therefore, labelling the acts of terrorism as an act of war provided Washington with a just cause. Additionally, it was constructed as a war of last resort with no diplomatic options available in order to combat the evil of terrorism; combined with the Christianity of the Bush administration, the war has been portrayed as a crusade for freedom fought in defence of liberty and is comparable to the Second World War, or "the ultimate good war" (Dexter, 2008: 66). As previously mentioned, great powers will go to great lengths to maintain their prestigious status. 9/11 shattered the perceptions of invulnerability the US projected as a global leader; hence, the war provided a stage to reassert Washington's power.

Conversely, Fletcher (2002) argues that war and justice are not synonymous. Justice is about restoring moral order in the universe, whereas war pursues interests that can only be achieved through death and destruction and compartmentalise the two risks imitating the holy mission of the enemy. Therefore, if the War on Terror was indeed in the pursuit of justice, the provisions of the Bill of Rights bearing on a fair trial should apply in Guantanamo as they do

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in the United States (ibid:7). Many Islamic fundamentalists perceived American bases in Saudi Arabia as an invasion of Dar el Islam, thus justified attack. However, as the law of war has evolved, religion is no longer a 'just cause', only self-defence against aggression has been normalized as such. As a result, despite a normative shift occurring in which people in the developed world perceive war as 'disgusting, ridiculous and unwise', it has now been repackaged as legitimised self-defence. Hence, the objectives of glory and justice continue to be achieved through the evolution of the actors and modes involved in warfare (Mueller, 1990:326).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the birth of a new international system that aided the development of international institutions and liberal norms after the Cold War, war and its fundamental objectives continue to endure in contemporary society. With the invention of new technological military weapons, actors with a persistent aspiration to attain control over resources in inter-state conflicts and the desire for great power states to assert their dominance in the international order through acts of self-defence, absolute and instrumental wars and agnostic fights continue to ensue. However, the rise of foreign liberal intervention to interrupt the natural courses of war to save civilians prevents decisive victories and obstructs the intended objectives resulting in endemic conflicts such as the Israel and Palestine dispute. As a result, more actors are often involved today, and eventual annihilation becomes an ever-increasing likely conclusion. Therefore, by analysing the three objectives: annihilation; advantage and glory; and justice, this essay has shown that while the modes of warfare and actors involved have evolved in the post-Cold War world, the critical military objectives of war Speier identified have remained apparent.

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