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The Paradòx of Warfare

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Abstract

The wars in the Ukraine and Gaza have resulted in such enormous costs that the war approach to conflicts must be rejected. Theories of war are based on rational assumptions like with Tzu and Clausewitz. Only Thucydides told the truth: cruelty, destruction and suffering. Given the destruction in Ukraine and Gaza, one may look into the peace literature for guidance.

Keywords

Violent Conflict, Attrition War, Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Sachs, Mèarsheimer, Costs of War (CW), Hamas

1. Introduction

We find two kinds of approaches in the philosophy of war. The standard model is to understand state warfare as driven by state interests or geopolitical considerations. Opposed we have the attempts to outline how the occurrence of war could be minimised or abolished all together Tzu (2020).

War is the prolongation of politics with other means, stated Clausewitz (1998). But this famous proposition on the essence of warfare rests upon the assumption that war can deliver. In reality, warfare is meaningless. Look at the ongoing wars in the Ukraine and Gaza: endless suffering.

The outcomes of war tend to fall far from the goals of warfare. War, said Clausewitz, is basically the imposition of your will upon another with violence. But the following holds:

Costs of war > benefits of war.

When war is started, there is opportunism about opportunity and hubris about capacity. When war is ended if at all, commentaries will be made to honour those who are no longer. The gulf between ends and means on the one hand and outcomes and on the other hand is huge in the wars of Ukraine and Gaza Thucydides (2005).

The way a war like Ukraine and Gaza develops is basically unpredictable. Yet

the standard model of warfare is committed to the rational choice model of behaviour on state level (Balissa, 2020).

2. Estimates and Bias Drivìng Warfare

I will first attempt to extract an implicit way of modelling land warfare from the main literature and then state its flaws. The *war plan* is the key concept with the following properties:

E) Estimates of the strengths of the war parties, of own strength and that of the other.

These estimations are *subjective* beliefs about one self and the other. They change over time, sometimes completely. *Bias* in estimation of own strength and that of the other tends to occur much ex ante the war, including help to be received from outside.

Thus, the Russian side was naively bullish about war ex ante. With mounting Russian losses came Ukrainian hubris. At the moment, it is an attrition war that Russia may win, if the NATO supply of arms and money fades away. Stunning, one may say, even Sweden has promised airplanes. The costs of war are staggering and casualties enormous on both sides.

Also in Gaza economic costs are very high, for Israel mobilising 300,000 soldiers and bombing the area continuously. But civilian costs are on such a scale that history will not forget. The huge Israeli military effort is estimated to eliminate Hamas from Gaza and their tunnels. It has resulted so far in very high death numbers among the civilians, women and children. The final toll may be close to genocide.

3. The Paradox

We come now to the *philosophical* question:

(Q) Could somehow the immense costs for the parties at war be avoided?

What we are looking for is a method by which in these two examples Russia and Ukraine as well as Israel and Hamas Palestine could use the corresponding resources for constructive purpose.

Let us call the costs of war hitherto CW. Assume that the gains from war are zero as well as that no endings are in sight. Thus:

(CW) Ex ante to T (now), including all costs caused by the war, from human to material costs.

In both these two wars CW is already very high and the end is not in sight. Why incur CW? A comparison with *status quo ante bellum* would involve a rejection of the war alternative. This is the *philosophical* paradox òf war: it is irrational.

4. The Regret Test

Regret offers a good test on rational behaviour. It involves a comparison of the SQ before war and the outcomes or realities. Few wars satisfy no regret, and certainly not Ukraine and Gaza. All the belligerents were better off at SQ. Even Hit-

ler expressed regret concerning his decision to join Mussolini in opening a Southern was theatre. The American war in Iraq and Afghanistan is today much regretted. Why the go war? China says that it will resume the exercise of sovereignty over Taiwan soon. Imagine such an Asian inferno.

5. Either or

Neither Russia nor Hamas needed to start the war with CW. Neither the Ukraine nor Israel needed to embark on a course of action leading to CW. So why not predict CW and prevent CW?

The reason of failure to predict is a combination of:

1) Myopia

Short-sighted leaders do not take this possibility of an attrition way into account. The war will be over soon, they think.

2) Opportunism

Actually, both parties may overestimate their strength and underestimate the opponent.

3) War hysteria

Ex ante, popular support for a war may be large. The dream of a quick and decisive victory looms considerably not only among decision-making, but also with citizens. The ugly faces of war appear soon and ex post the losses count with despair.

The Russians had hubris ex ante, whereas the Ukraine overestimated their chances after Russian initial adverse. Now Ukraine is said to loose, although Russia may still make strategic mistakes. However, the Ukraine cannot support its CW without foreign aid. Zelenskyj managed great contributions from some NATO countries, being welcome to speak in several Parliaments. "As long as it may take" was promised by the US, now starting to hesitate. Both Russia and Ukraine spend hundreds of million dollars a day as CW. Waste!

6. Ukraine War: Cui Bono?

American scholars Sachs (2023) and Mearsheimer (2023) claim on YouTube (2023) that the US lured Ukraine into the war by advising them to insist upon NATO membership. It is not known whether the war was really about democracy, EU membership or adhesion to NATO, but the CW have been catastrophic for Ukraine and Zelenskyj. If democracy and neutrality could be archived, Ukraine would not have CW repenting costs, although Crimea could not be recaptured.

Imagine a regret test between status quo ante bellum and the situation S today: why fighting with so much destruction? Clearly, SQ > S for both Ukraine and Russia.

7. Gaza Warfare: No Regret?

Even Israel runs colossal CW. And the CW for the people at Gaza is astronomical. Could these costs of war have been avoided and positive outcomes promoted?

The stunning relation is that between Hamas and the people of Gaza. No matter what Hamas does to Israelis, the action is applauded. The atrocities of 7/11 could hardly have been viewed by Israel as but war. Now the people of Gaza has lost everything. But they hardly blame Hamas.

Hamas is a special type of Muslim organisation. It adheres to the most violent Muslim rhetoric originating in the town of *Deobandi* during the Indian uproar against British rule. The Muslim lesson of the defeat in *Sepoy Uproar* was that *jihad* was the central concept in modern Islamic message. Even the death of Muslims at suicide bombing could be necessary for Islam to prevail.

8. The Mechanism

Political theorists are by no means all so-called realists. The realists focusing on power and sovereignty are numerous, but they are opposed by moral and legal theorists. Actually, alongside the development of theories of state sovereignty, there emerged proposals about limiting that absolute power. Not only was there the theme of a *just war*, but peace projects were launched to promote eternal peace. Two mechanisms were discussed at lenth:

1) Arbitration

2) World federation.

Today, we have 2) but not 1), although the UN framework is not strong to prevent war. Arbitration occurs, but it is voluntary.

What is missing is not stronger institutions—the governments of the states of the globe would never accept this. Instead the interest in avoiding the huge costs of war (CW) should be recognised.

To make the belligerents focus on the costs of war, the (CW) for each of the belligerents should be monitored from ex ante to ex post. It would be clearer to the belligerents what their costs could amount to and help them search alternatives of action. This is relevant before, during and after the war. Such considerations, backed by science inquiry, could have changed strategies in both the Ukraine war and the Palestine warfare. Even for warmongers who see war as an end and not a means, it would be interesting to know (CW) for various alternatives of strategy.

9. Foolishness Is Costly in Wars

Foolish postures are commonplace in conflicts leading to wars. The Palestine people would be tremendous better if its leaders had accepted the two states solution from 1948 òr 2000. For every time Israel is in warfare, the outcome is that it becomes bigger in size òf country.

Professor Sachs on YouTube claims to have the solution to the conflict Palestine versus Israel: two states. Alas, Palestine leadership said No. The people of Palestine has to carry an enormous burden due to Yassir Arafat reneging on a most favourable solution.

Theories of war deal with the best strategy or tactics, but they examine little the costs of war in the comprehensive sense. Under the auspices of the UN, a re-

search centre would examine all kinds of war costs—total, per day etc. This information would be publicly accessible.

The mechanism could counteract the regret typical of the paradox of war. With hindsight Ukraine would not have played its cards as it did. Sachs has called attention to the capricious play of the US, luring Zelenskyj with the NATO card.

Regret is the paradox of war: "if only we had done differently". This hindsight also includes peace along the status quo. Actually, one party may be winning but still finds that:

Costs > benefits.

The Pyrrhus victory does not escape the paradox of war. Hamas attempts to avoid it by calling their losses "*martyrs*", meaning they are on the road to *Paradise*. Genghis Kahn knew how to play with the paradox of war by demanding surrender with life spared or face elimination from Earth. He kept his word in both outcomes.

As chauvinism often characterizes the start of war, the peace advocate can only present the costs of war to stop warfare. The case against war is strongest when it holds that:

BW < CW

For all belligerents involved.

10. Conclusion

Humans pursue interests wherever they may be. And they may use war to prevail. States regard the right to war as emanating from sovereignty—Bodin's hall mark of the state. Using its resources, the state may attack another country. Then the costs of warfare arise, i.e. CW. They must now take centre stage.

More and more, modern warfare becomes technologies to hurt civilians. Consequently, CB can only rise. It is far too easy to begin warfare and much too difficult to end it quickly. One hundred years ago roughly, Bertha von Sutter received the Nobel peace prize and her message of approaching conflicts without warfare couldn't be more relevant, as states arm like crazy. One hears often talk of a third world war. Time for the regret test!

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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