

**Political Science 972: International Conflict**  
**Discussion Questions for Week 3**  
**Historical Development of War: Modern**

1. Is "war" a single phenomenon that transcends both time and culture, or has the literature on war actually lumped together several different phenomena that are quite different (beyond the fact that they involve killing). At what point in the historical record (and on what topics) does it become legitimate to use historical examples as a guide to the study of the causes of contemporary war? For example, even a writer as recent as Clausewitz (1830's) was studying an era devoid of the machine gun, railroad, radio, armored vehicles, democratically-accountable governments, mass literacy, and nuclear weapons (Clausewitz also devoted virtually no attention to the role of technological change). At the same time, it periodically becomes trendy in the policy community to use Sun-Tzu (300BCE?), Thucydides (400BCE), Julius Caesar (50 BCE) and other classical writers to support current policy recommendations. In what areas are these older studies still relevant and on what topics are they essentially useless because of subsequent technological and political changes? Same set of questions about culture: are there civilized (i.e. urbanized, literate, socially stratified) cultures that have treated violence between political units sufficiently differently than Western culture that one is effectively dealing with a different phenomenon?

2. Summarize and assess Keegan's critique of Clausewitz. More generally, to what extent is the widespread adoption (or worship—see <http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/CWZBASE.htm>; accessed 8 Feb 06) of Clausewitz by the professionalized militaries of the West a reflection of the brilliance and universal applicability of the Clausewitzian framework versus a reflection of the particular role of the military in industrialized societies? (the same issue, by the way, can be raised with respect to Thucydides).

3. Assess the impact on political and military organization of the following innovations:

- gunpowder
- industrialization
- long-distance communication

Do these changes tell us anything about the possible political and military impact of new *information* technologies? Are there other historical changes that might be a better guide to the effects (if any) of information technology?

[Related question: Do we really know what the effects of industrialization are, or is this an evolving issue since large parts of the world are still pre-industrial? Is the European and North American experience with industrialization likely to generalize?]

4. What are we to make of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Based on the global historical record, assess the relative importance of *technological* and *cultural* factors in determining the extent and character of politically-motivated violence. You might start addressing this by considering cases where:

- a. Character of war has changed significantly despite minimal changes in technology
- b. Character of war has changed significantly despite minimal changes in culture

5. To what extent has international conflict during the 20th century been typical; to what extent has it been atypical. Prepare a list of both characteristics, and also think about this question with respect to three time frames: post-1815, post-1650, and war in general. Based on this, to what extent does this affect our theories about war? For example, do those theories implicitly assume steady technological change? Do they implicitly assume a bureaucratized state with an efficient system of taxation? Do they implicitly assume that a state can effectively mobilize its economy to engage in war? That the state can motivate (and mobilize) soldiers through appeals to nationalism and/or ideology. (You get the idea—keep extending this list, but be very specific)

6. European theorists, with few exceptions, were almost totally incorrect in predicting the effects that changes in technology in the 19th century would have on the length and intensity of warfare, despite having fairly good evidence from the US Civil War and the Boer War. If one takes the experience of the 1980s and 1990s, what lessons should we be deriving about changes in future wars? In particular, would the experience of the wars of the 1980s provide an accurate prediction of what occurred in Iraq/Kuwait in 1990-91? Chechnya? How about the wars (or lack therefore) subsequent to 1991, notably Haiti 1994, Kosovo 1999, Afghanistan 2001 and Iran 2003? You might find it useful to distinguish between issues where a change is very clear and issues where some uncertainty has been introduced but we don't know the effects.

7. Based on the various articles in Art & Waltz, evaluate the extent to which war is a "reflexive" phenomenon: the theories about how and why war is fought determine the reality of how and why war is fought. [Note that according to a positivist perspective, it should be the other way around.] Has this become more true in recent history than in the past, and if so, why?

8. To an observer from almost any other period in world history, the most unusual characteristic about international politics in the 20th century would be the importance of ideology [as with all of these questions, you can challenge this premise...]. But this seems to play a very limited role in the discussions in Art & Waltz. Or does it? Should it?

9. What, if anything, would the articles in Art and Waltz tell us about the arguments for the US getting involved in Iraq in 2003? What would they tell us about how that conflict has evolved in the years following 2003?

9. Assess the various arguments by Mueller, Kaysen and others on the issue of the obsolescence of war. Pay particular attention to the following dimensions:

- a. The extent to which the utility of war has changed due to *social* factors (both domestic and international) versus *material* factors (e.g. changes in technology and changes in the economic rewards of warfare.) There may also be some additional factors that are relevant.
- b. The extent to which this applies to major powers versus smaller powers, and also the definition of "power." For example, major economic powers might not find war effective, but states with less economic power (e.g. Iraq) might.
- c. The role of non-state actors and the blurring of the lines between international and domestic conflict (as in Zaire/Congo or Chechnya, which occurred after most of these articles were written). Also the linkage between this and "democratization" in the general sense (i.e. the legitimation of democratic norms in most of the world.)

d. The role, if any, of nuclear weapons. The role, if any, of international organizations. The role, if any, of modern communication.

Another way of approaching this question is to ask yourself what the current system would look like to an individual in 1950, 1900 or 1850. Or, more concretely, what would seem familiar and unfamiliar (other than the technology) to Dwight Eisenhower, Theodore Roosevelt, or Robert E. Lee? The contrast to 1900—when war was considered by many people to be a really cool thing that was a general benefit to humanity, and conquest (i.e. colonialism) certainly satisfied that criterion—is particularly striking.

10. To what extent does military technology explain the rise and fall of European colonial empires?