

**Political Science 972: International Conflict**  
**Discussion Questions for Week 5**  
**Qualitative Theories of War II**

1. Assess the characteristics that distinguish the four general categories of wars that Blainey discusses in chapters 12 – 15: protracted (Blainey’s “vendetta” category), long wars, short wars, and wide wars. What characteristics of a conflict that exist prior to a war are likely to put it into one of these categories—that is, to what extent can the nature of a future war be predicted? To what extent have these characteristics changed over time, due to either changes in technology or politics (e.g. replacement of authoritarian systems with democratic systems; end of imperial systems)

2. "Opportunistic" wars, which are referred to in a number of Blainey’s chapters, occur when one nation takes advantage of a temporary weakness of another to try to score a quick victory. How does one identify such a situation in advance:

- How does one recognize the motivations for a war
- How does one recognize that a "weakness" has occurred—in particular, is there some coherent definition of "power" we could use here that is not dependent on the knowledge that a war has already occurred?

Where in the contemporary international system would you identify potential opportunistic wars, or are these a thing of the past? In particular, are there non-dynastic analogues to the “death-watch” wars?

3. Blainey makes the usual argument that the balance between offense and defense has a critical impact on the length and intensity of war. Based on your knowledge of contemporary military technology, where do we stand on that issue now: compared to WWII? compared to WWI? compared to the Napoleonic Wars?

4. Evaluate Blainey's arguments with respect to the possibility of "accidental" war. Note that any discussion of this depends heavily on what is meant by "accident." But for starters, how likely is it that a war will occur if neither participant wants a war? (Now the definition of "want" becomes critical...) Does the answer to this question significantly differ if one is dealing with the *initiation* of a war as opposed to the *expansion* of a war? Also to what extent are the “accidents” more likely when there has been a period of technological change?

Conversely, is there a point prior to the outbreak of a war (or some definable category of wars) when the war becomes, in some sense, "inevitable?" (WWI, by the way, is probably not a good example to generalize from here.) Is it possible to identify this process with information available prior to the war or does it become evident only in hindsight or with information that could not, realistically, be known prior to the war (e.g. the inner thoughts of decision-makers; not like we know those thoughts really well after the war either...). What sort of time horizon is involved here? Has this situation changed significantly with the availability of modern communications (e.g. CNN effect, instant electronic communication, availability of mediators flying in overnight). Same question with respect to contemporary mediation and peacekeeping institutions.

5. In chapter 14, Blainey introduces another potential economic constraint on war (distinct from the Manchester thesis): long wars are too expensive, will result in inflation, and states therefore

cannot engage in a major war even if they do manage to get involved in one. How has this hypothesis fared during the 20th century? More generally, how useful are economic considerations (e.g. economic sanctions) in affecting political behavior which might result in war?

More generally, discuss the relative impact of economics on the initiation and the limitation of war: to what extent are wars initiated for economic gain (or to prevent economic losses), and to what extent does the cost and risk of a war limit its scope. How has this been changed since the 1500s by technology? By politics?.

6. With the huge increase in the amount of information that the public has available for making political decisions, has the psychological tendency to over-estimate the likelihood of success in military conflict that Blainey discusses become stronger or weaker?

7. Blainey is skeptical that nuclear weapons have changed everything. What are Blainey's arguments in this regard, and what is your response to them? What has changed to make these arguments more or less valid in the 35 years since Blainey wrote the book? Are there other social, political, economic or technological changes that might be as relevant as nuclear weapons?

8. What, if anything, has Blainey missed? Are there other qualitative theories of war that could be given a treatment similar to those that Blainey discusses? How do the various case studies in Art and Waltz, Part II fit into Blainey's theories?—can one explain each of those cases using one of the theories?

Somewhat related, can these theories also be applied—perhaps with some minor modifications—to situations where one or both of the antagonists are non-state actors, or are these generally theories of state action?