

On War as a Permanent Condition

Five years ago a Norwegian statistician set a computer to work counting history's wars. The machine quickly, competently and a bit contemptuously announced that in 5,560 years of recorded human history there have been 14,531 wars, or, as the computer pointed out, 2.6135 a year. Of 185 generations of man's recorded experience, the machine noted with a touch of sarcasm, only ten have known unsullied peace. And even as he always has, man these days is fighting man.

In Kipling country, Indians and Pakistanis last week slammed away at one another with polyglot curses and American weapons. In South Viet Nam, sticks of paratroopers fell and bloomed from big-bellied U.S. Hercules transports in the grandest airdrop of the war. In Yemen, sun-blackened Arab guerrillas warily avoided Egyptian troops; in the Sudan, rebellious blacks kept up a tenacious hit-and-run pressure on Khartoum's troops. Befeathered Simbas in the Congo set ambushes for Colonel Mike Hoare's mercenary force. Turks and Greeks on Cyprus, Indonesians and Malays in the Malacca Straits, Portuguese and Angolans in West Africa, OAS troops and Dominicans in Santo Domingo—all kept their powder dry and their gunsights blackened.

Roughly speaking, ten wars are in progress throughout the world this week. They range from petty conflicts in which the strategic weapon is a poisoned arrow to major air raids in which jet B-52s bomb jungle hideaways. As a leading French strategist on the Quai d'Orsay puts it: "There is no longer such a thing as war and peace, just different levels of confrontation."

The Muscle-Bound Big Nations

Nuclear war, carried to holocaust, may yet scour the planet Earth; the "ultimate deterrent" may become, in Julian Huxley's phrase, the "ultimate detergent." But it is a valid interim observation that the Bomb seems to be keeping peace quite effectively among its possessors, bearing out Churchill's ironic comment that he "looked forward with great confidence to the potentiality of universal destruction." Illogically, the general feeling that nuclear war equals suicide or surrender

has induced a similar sentiment among some that any war is unthinkable. But a Pentagon count of conventional wars since 1945 adds up to 40, only a little fewer than history's average.

While the awful possibilities of their own strengths make the big nations muscle-bound and the United Nations grows ever more helpless in preventing conflict, the small, non-nuclear countries have found limited wars to be a functional means of settling disputes. The very possession of doomsday weaponry by the U.S. and Russia has forestalled the main event, but lesser powers feel free to slug it out in dozens of other arenas.

There is, moreover, a larger supply of these small-bore combatants. Since 1945 the nations of the world have almost doubled in number, from 68 to 127. Each new country has its own self-interest, its own power of decision and—thanks to the cold war and the resulting supplies of weapons and military training—its own armed forces. Alastair Buchan of London's Institute for Strategic Studies points out that "there are more military men acting as political leaders than at any time in the 20th century." He cites Pakistan's President Mohammed Ayub Khan, Burma's Ne Win, Thailand's Thanom Kittikachorn, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, Algeria's Houari Boumedienne, Saigon's Nguyen Cao Ky, France's Charles de Gaulle and such nonprofessional but militaristic figures as Cuba's Fidel Castro and Indonesia's Sukarno.

War thus needs continuous redefinition. Prussia's Karl von Clausewitz (who died in 1831 of cholera) gave the modern starting point by defining war as the extension of state policy by other means. To him, victory was "the destruction of the enemy forces," but he held an equally warm regard for the limited objective. Defense was at least as strong a position as offense, and putting the enemy off stride as valuable as knocking him flat. To that extent, generals who could forestall defeat were as honorable as those who won famous victories.

Warfare since Clausewitz has grown more refined, and American officials now look at it more in terms of intensiveness than offensiveness. General Harold K. Johnson, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, discerns three categories:

- HIGH-INTENSITY WAR uses the most modern military technology. Its firepower is delivered largely by missiles, aircraft and missile-armed submarines. All of the knockout punch is thermonuclear and aimed by the most advanced intelligence and command techniques, undoubtedly including spy satellites and pushbuttons. It sounds like Armageddon, but Physicist Herman Kahn in his current Clausewitzian study, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios*, argues that high-intensity war has a rationale. He identifies 44 stages of escalation, ranging from

"Ostensible Crisis," in which no bridges are burned (Rung 1), through "Constrained Force-Reduction Salvo against weak links at the outbreak of a war" (Rung 35) to "Spasm or Insensate War" with "all buttons pressed." His point: controlled response is as possible with thermonuclear artillery as it was with the howitzers of yore.

- MID-INTENSITY WAR, a conventional-weapon conflict in which neither total offense nor total victory is envisioned in planning, accepts policy limitations such as shunning air attacks against Hanoi in North Viet Nam. Korea and Viet Nam are the only postwar examples of mid-intensity war.
- LOW-INTENSITY WAR aims at establishing, maintaining or regaining control of land areas threatened by guerrillas, revolutionaries or conquerors. The U.S. might initiate a low-intensity war in a Latin American nation in order to preclude a Castroite takeover or to carry off a coup as it did in 1954 against Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz. The Congolese rebellions of 1960-62 and 1964 were of low intensity, as were most of the Latin American and Middle Eastern conflicts of the past two decades. The battle between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has fluctuated between low intensity (as in such diversions as last spring's Rann of Kutch fighting) and mid-intensity (as in the current conflict, where neither side has weapons enough to carry the battle to total victory).

The Perfect Volley

The shift away from large-scale, high-intensity war marks a significant turning point in the history of warfare, an atavism of arms that reverses a trend begun in 1793 with the French Revolution. Before then, war had been mostly a professional concern. The 10,000 Greeks who marched up-country with Xenophon were fighting for pay, not glory; early Rome practiced a limited conscription, but by the Augustan age (27 B.C.-14 A.D.), Rome's empire was firmly enough established to be secured by a tough army of 300,000 professionals. Apart from the mob-scene Crusades, the wars of medieval Europe were brief and relatively bloodless: Edward III had no more than 30,000 men at Crécy, and Henry V at Agincourt only 15,000.

From the mid-17th century to the end of the 18th, European warfare grew less savage, more scientific. Gunpowder replaced cold steel; siege work and precision drill supplanted the wild charge. The key to victory lay in the "perfect volley" delivered at point-blank range by tautly disciplined infantrymen, as Wolfe demonstrated on the Plains

of Abraham. The key to defense lay in maneuver: French Marshal Comte Hermann Maurice de Saxe wrote, "I am sure that a clever general can wage war as long as he lives without being compelled to battle."

Mass war, precursor of this century's two world wars, began when Napoleon instituted universal conscription. The generals of the 19th century also turned away from the minimal-loss thinking of their predecessors. "I desire nothing so much as a big battle," declared Bonaparte. U. S. Grant in the American Civil War concurred; indeed, only by the constant bloody pressure he put on the Army of Northern Virginia was the war won for the North. In World War I, Foch and Haig, Hindenburg and Ludendorff pressed the attack for four years—with the goal of lasting just 15 minutes longer than the enemy army.

With World War II and the arrival of the heavy bomber, that strategy was broadened to include destruction of the enemy economy as well. And the atom bombs that the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki proved the effectiveness of ending a war by wholesale destruction. In 1949 Russia acquired its own nuclear bombs, and the postwar peace that so many had believed would last forever now appeared threatened by the possibility of all-out nuclear war between the two giants. Any war at all, it was feared, must inevitably lead to a catastrophic blowup between the two great nuclear powers.

Then came Korea. Harry Truman's courageous decision to intervene in 1950 showed not only that Communism could be contained without recourse to all-out nuclear war, but that a sizable, well-equipped conventional force was mandatory for any nation that would head off a Communist takeover. It was still the threat of massive retaliation that kept Stalin out of Western Europe, but it took American infantry and artillery, American ships and aircraft to secure the safety of South Korea. That same flexible mix, augmented by General Maxwell Taylor's Special Forces and clouds of helicopters, is now making the Viet Cong look like losers in South Viet Nam.

Thus has the interplay of weaponry and history left the U.S. equipped for—and apparently in for—limited war. "The major powers will be drawn more and more into little wars," predicts the Quai d'Orsay strategist. "There will be a period of disequilibrium and tension for, say, the next 50 years." France's General Pierre Gallois contends that "Viet Nam is the beginning and not the end of America's great Asian adventure." The U.S. is in a sense fighting the same sort of wars that the British fought in the 19th century—peripheral battles at the end of thin red lines.

Viet Nam and many another of the era's conflicts represent Communist aggressions under the umbrella of nuclear standoff: 23 of the 40 wars involved Communists. Of the remaining 17, eight were anticolonial struggles—ranging from the Indonesian rebellion against The Neth-

erlands (1945–47) through Kenya's Mau Mau "emergency" (1952–53) and Algeria (1956–62) to the Angolan revolt, now five years old. Another six fall into the category of neighbor-against-neighbor, such as the Pakistani-Indian war in 1947–49 and its current revival or the Algerian-Moroccan border war of 1963.

There were three outright grabs, as when Red China captured Tibet in 1950. Significantly, in only three cases have nuclear-armed nations indulged in high-handed power plays in the past 20 years: Britain and France in Suez (1956); Russia in Hungary the same year; the U.S. in Cuba (during 1961's Bay of Pigs debacle). Of the remaining confrontations, the only one that saw nuclear-armed nations opposing each other directly (rather than opposing a non-nuclear ally of a big power) was the Cuban Missile Quarantine of 1962.

"Sorry About That"

Pope John XXIII in his last encyclical rather wistfully held out hope that *pacem in terris* is attainable without the shedding of blood. Yet "there are situations," argues Theologian Paul Tillich, "in which nothing short of war can defend the dignity of the person." Thus a nation may usually be defending national interests, but this purpose does not preclude defending moral interests as well.

The U.S. national interest came first, as Pentagon Planner Seymour Deitchman points out, "in the use of the atom bomb, the Mexican war, the war with Spain over Cuba, the destruction of American Indian tribal society, failure to support the Hungarian rebellion. We were able to rationalize our moral problems, which were real and recognized, because the political and economic problems were greater and more urgent." Similarly, Kashmir is of national interest to Indians, who believe that its loss would put in jeopardy hundreds of other princely states and consequently imperil India's tenuous union itself. It is also of national interest to Moslem Pakistan that Kashmir (80% Moslem itself) be taken into the fold of political Islam.

But the limited wars that the U.S. is now fighting, and doubtless will continue to fight for the next half-century or more, have a moral purpose too. In South Viet Nam, this purpose is to preserve freedom of choice for that country and others near it that the Communists might overwhelm. As Lyndon Johnson has time and time again explained, the U.S. seeks no territory, seeks no wider war.

No humane man can applaud the cruelties of war, yet no man of dignity can shrink from war if he is to preserve his freedom. Indeed, wars often have the virtue of deciding issues more definitely than diplomacy. Israel exists today not because the Jews were capable negotiators but because they were courageous fighters against the Arabs.

India ignored its own sanctimonious praise of peace to seize Portuguese Goa and thus permanently removed that galling thorn from its side. By contrast, the feud between Turkish and Greek Cypriots still festers despite years of negotiations and may never be settled short of full-scale civil war.

War is, in sum, horrible but definitive, repellent but—pending realization of the dream of world order—inevitable. Soldiers in all wars usually manage to make some rueful appraisal of this human dilemma, and the G.I.s in South Viet Nam are no exception. Their catchall comment, endlessly applied to one another's hard-luck stories of great pain or minor difficulty, is a deadpan "Sorry about that."

For Discussion and Writing

1. How would you describe the author's attitude in this essay? Does he or she seem to view war as a tragic consequence of the human condition, a necessary evil, a glorious enterprise?
2. What are the three types of war this writer defines, and how does the shift away from one mark "a significant turning point in the history of warfare"?
3. What, in this author's view, justifies war? Do you agree?
4. In the closing remarks, the author concludes that war is inevitable. Write an essay in which you attack or defend this conclusion. Does accepting or expecting the inevitability of war become a self-fulfilling prophesy? Is there evidence to suggest that even limited conflict might be managed without resort to war?