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THE CAUSES OF INTENSE WAR

I. THE MYSTERY OF LIMITED/INTENSE WAR

Some wars are total from the outset, like World War I. Some start quietly but end with a bang, like World War II in Europe, which opened the 1939-40 "Sitzkrieg" but became total. Some remain limited, like Korea and Vietnam. Why?

II. SEVEN COMMON HYPOTHESES ON LIMITED WAR

A. "Destructive Weapons Cause Destructive War"--and its less-popular opposite: "Mutual Deterrence Prevents Destructive War."

Consider four hypotheses on arms and the intensity of war:

1. States destroy what they can. The violence of war corresponds to the destructive power of states.
2. States destroy what they cannot avoid destroying. The violence of war depends on whether weapons are discriminating, e.g., accurate or not.
3. States destroy what they must to accomplish their war goals. The violence of war corresponds to the scope of those goals, and hence to the scope of political conflict between the belligerents.
4. States destroy least when they fear large punishment in return. The violence of war corresponds inversely to the ability of both belligerents to punish the other.

Note: Propositions #A1 and #A4 are mirror opposites. What to make of this?

Solutions implied by Proposition #A1:

- > Disarmament.
- > Deploy forces that can disarm the other side--e.g., strategic nuclear counterforce forces (accurate silo-busting ICBMs and strategic defenses for cities).

Solutions implied by Proposition #A2:

- > Deploy discriminating weapons that can be used without collateral damage--e.g., laser-guided bombs. Ban land mines, especially hard-to-clear anti-personnel mines.

Solution implied by Proposition #A3:

- > All states should adopt defensive force postures, so that their neighbors will not be insecure, hence will not feel the need to adopt desperate measures in a search for security.

Solution implied by Proposition #A4:

- > States should arm themselves abundantly with well-protected weapons of mass destruction. "Nuclear weapons are your friend!"

B. "Total War Doctrine Causes Total War, Limited War Doctrines Allow Limited War."

- C. "Defining and Observing Thresholds Helps Keep War Limited"--e.g., "I won't use gas if you won't."
- D. "Don't destroy your opponent's command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I)"--otherwise they can't observe your restraint or make peace with you.

III. CAUSES OF WAR AS CAUSES OF ESCALATION

- A. First-strike advantages. When these exist, wars
 - 1. Start at an intense level. Cf. 1941 Japanese attack on the U.S.; 1941 German attack on the USSR; 1967 Arab-Israeli war; compare with 1939 war in Europe, U.S. in Vietnam.
 - 2. Are fought intensely as each attacks before it is attacked.
 - 3. Widen as belligerents preempt neutrals. Cf. the German invasion of Norway 1940.
 - 4. Are harder to stop due to the treachery displayed by a surprise attack--why should the attacker now be trusted to keep peace?
- B. Large windows--i.e., fluctuations in relative power. When these exist, wars
 - 1. Start at an intense level. Cf. World War I, 1941 Pacific War.
 - 2. Escalate as states "jump through" windows of opportunity in wartime. Cf. Hitler's 1940 attack on France, Germany's 1918 offensive.
 - 3. Widen as neutrals jump in to exploit war-caused windows.
Note: windows also make war more barbaric. Belligerents often massacre POWs and populations for "preventive" reasons, i.e., otherwise they will escape and rejoin the fight. See e.g., the 1976 massacre of Tal Zataar in Lebanon. Moreover, such horrors make losers fight to the end.
- C. False optimism. This makes war
 - 1. Persist--see e.g., World War I, World War II, Vietnam.
 - 2. Escalate--see e.g., German 1917 submarine campaign, the Athenians' Syracusan expedition.
 - 3. Widen.
- D. Cumulative resources. When resources are cumulative states struggle to control them for themselves, and to destroy them, in order to deny them to their opponent. These two motives drive much wartime destruction.
- D. Offense vs. Defense: Does a strong offense make war more or less intense? 1914-1918 vs. 1792, 1939.

IV. WARFIGHTING STRATEGY AND ESCALATION

- A. Do offensive operations cause or dampen escalation? The Altmark incident; the rush to the Yalu, 1950; the Posen-Navy debate over Murmansk.
- B. Also: remember Admiral Boscowen and the danger of self-opened windows.

V. DOES WAR BEGET WAR? IF SO, WHY?

- A. War aims may expand in wartime as each side adopts a darker image of the other's intentions.
- B. The blackmail problem.
- C. False wartime optimism.
- D. Wartime hyper-nationalism and chauvinist mythmaking.
- E. Wartime non-evaluation:

1. Critical assessment of official policy becomes "aid and comfort to the enemy"--and in fact it is!
 2. Wartime breakdown of communication between adversaries ---> no external evaluation of each side's domestic debate ---> lopsided debates on war aims. Hawks can lie unanswered about the enemy.
- F. Sunk-cost dynamics and ego-investment by elites who can't admit they were wrong.
- G. The popular desire for vengeance. An emotional factor.
- H. Do "Cleon's" (the military, other hawks) wield more political power in wartime?
- A missing concept in wartime: The "Treason of the Hawks." Collaborating with enemies is reviled, but ruining one's country in avoidable warfare is a crime with no name and no punishment.

VI. WHAT WILL WORLD WAR III BE LIKE? THE NUCLEAR REVOLUTION AND THE INTENSITY OF WAR