

The Global State of War*

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There is almost no human activity that is as intensely social as modern warfare[...] Every general staff in the world, since 1914, has known that bravery of individual soldiers is about as essential as whether they are handsome.¹

The Social Nature of War

The main thesis of this paper is that war is a social fact and therefore its changes tend to be reflected in the structure of society and on the essence of social life. This thesis brings to the fore the interaction of two dimensions which are usually considered opposites: ‘society’, meaning the whole of relationships that hold human beings together, and ‘war’, the extreme situation where humans oppose and kill one another.² I will attempt to demonstrate here that war and society are not incompatible. Actually, it is their implications – such as between the internal and external sides of Western society, between our apparently protected or normal existence and the conflict in the rest of the world – that show us that no solution of continuity exists. This much more is true as in the case of the processes of globalisation when conflicts in every part of the world tend to overlap, to be linked and have an influence over one another.³

It can be said that the connection between war and society is somewhat overshadowed within the social sciences. In the 20th century (the greatest period of development in sociology and anthropology), few notable writers were concerned with this matter; it

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1 Ballard (1996: 13).

2 While the definition of society is more or less clear, the one for war is controversial. For my discussion, war means any type of external conflict where, officially or otherwise, States or coalitions of States are involved. See the entry ‘War’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

3 Walker (2005).

was as if war were an exception, an anomaly to be ignored.⁴ There exists an important tradition of the sociology of occupations and of military organisations; but *war*, a nearly always unpredictable dynamic and element of change, finds a secondary position in the common education of society.⁵ There seems to be a blank, or rather a removal, which extends to other disciplines like political philosophy or political studies. It can be observed that, for centuries, history was a history of wars, if not of battles; but this changes little the outline of the reticence being alluded to. Only recently, historical discourse has faced up to the systematic description of war (or better still of combat) as a boundary of a social situation where human beings are involved.⁶

The definition of war as a social fact brings us back to two main views. The first is that war, just like all other human activities, such as science or art, is only comprehensible in the perspective of specific types of society. Each form of war reflects, broadly speaking, a type of social and political order. By keeping to modern history, anyone can understand the differences between the incessant dynastic wars of the 18th century, fought mainly by armies formed of mercenaries, and the total wars of the 20th century, when nation states, democracies or dictatorships amassed military forces, comprising millions of men, in order to force their enemies into powerlessness. The second view is less evident, as it concerns the *specifically* social nature of warfare. Even though sociological works rarely deal with war, this is a social fact *par excellence*. Not only because it puts to the test the cohesion of society, as in the case of mass deaths (and the consequences, mourning and devastation),⁷ but also because it is an amalgam of socially complex processes. Economic mobilization, scientific and technological innovation, the arming and training of enormous military forces, advanced intellectual works like the strategy and planning of military campaigns, elaborated management. The direction and

4 Apart from Comte and Spencer, commentaries on war by the fathers of social theory are few and far between (Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Pareto etc.). This applies to the greatest of them all, see Weber (1988). Of the theorists of the following generation only Raymond Aron demonstrated an active interest for war (see Aron, 1962). An attempt to investigate the general social morphology of armed conflict was undertaken by the so-called polemology, after the 2nd World War; see Bouthoul (1951). It was a work met not with complete disinterest, but destined to be lost due to its pretentious claims.

5 Marginal, of course, compared to handbook knowledge. If one leaves aside political history literature (about the role of violence and the modernity of revolutions), sociological interest seems to have especially addressed the sociology of the military profession and its rapport with civil society. Among the leading titles are: Huntington (1957); Janowitz (1960); Janowitz (1968); Segal and Sinaiko (1986); van Doorn (1968); Burk (1994); Moskos, Williams, and Segal (2000). Among Marxian attempts to investigate the relationship between capitalism and war, see Shaw (1984); Mann, (1988); Shaw (1988). Concerning the overall state of art in military sociology and war, see Caplow and Venneseon (1999).

6 See Keegan (1976). After the publication of this book it became popular in military history to view wars and battles from a 'lower perspective.' See, for example, Gilbert (1994), in which strategic and military reconstruction are integrated, in a mechanical way, by writings and letters of a large number of soldiers.

7 We could, realistically, regard war in the same way as social innovation as much as Durkheim viewed criminal phenomena; see Durkheim (1901).

control of considerable organisational structures which have, by definition, to face the prospect of being destroyed or disabled.⁸

The thesis of this essay is not just confined to bringing to light the social complexity of war. It is also to underline how war can *transform* society. The main reason for this capacity lies in the independent drive and innovative force of military systems. In 1914, the chiefs of staff of the major powers were about to come face to face on the battlefield. They had in mind short campaigns of but few months, as they were still influenced by open warfare and the typical manoeuvres of the 19th century.⁹ The German attack on the Western Front, based on a grandiose plan to surround the Anglo-French forces (the Schlieffen Plan), at first seemed to have obtained its objective. The conquest of Paris would have brought the conflict to an end.¹⁰ However, it ground to a halt. The Germans were unable to dominate such a vast battleground; the French resistance had been tenacious. The belligerent powers had not forecast that war, as a result of the mobilisation of millions of men and the development of even more powerful weapons, would not only put armed forces against each other but also entire societies. As a result, the European nations were involved in trench warfare for five years that radically altered the political balance on the Continent, laying the foundation for an even more devastating conflict. The memory of human butchery, interlaced with the Great Depression, conditioned the foreign policy of major and minor powers for decades to come. In Germany, Italy and Japan a sense of frustration and revenge welled up to stoke the fires of extremist nationalism, militarism and the rearmament of the 1930s. In England and France, there was a fall into social and political depression which impeded the precise evaluation of the Nazi and Fascist threats and Japanese aggressiveness.¹¹

Wars transform society in ways that extend beyond foreign policy. They deeply affect the patterns of lives. In some countries, and not only in those of the defeated, the First World War caused new forms of political conflict, which were transformed into revolutions hence leading to the rise of totalitarian regimes. In other countries, it was not unusual to see changes in industrial development, and the expansion of consumption in order to re-launch an impoverished economy. The boom in the car and civil aviation industries, since the 1920s, brought forth the early warning signs of social economics and authoritarian management systems, processes which would heavily influence the daily working and family life of millions of people.¹² In turn these profound changes

8 For a technical but illuminating analysis about the organisational complexity of the war machine in combat situations, see Crevelde (1985). However, the best definition of the social complexity of war remains du Picq (1880), which might be seen as the equivalent in the military sector to Durkheim's works on social solidarity. It could be interesting to compare du Picq and Durkheim in detail.

9 Keegan (1998).

10 The Schlieffen plan is a prime example of strategic utopianism. Schlieffen, the general chief of staff of the Reich's armed forces, shortly before the outbreak of the Great War, elaborated the plan starting from a complicated reflection on the pincer strategy, which was inspired by the unsurpassed model of the Battle of Canne, where Hannibal destroyed the Roman army. Schlieffen, in other words, believed that strategy was in some way free of historical and physical circumstances. See Von Schlieffen (1913).

11 Brendon (2002).

12 Ariès and Duby (1988).

would play a fundamental role in transforming military apparatus and the methods of war-making. During the stage of international underground combustion, which characterised the apparent peaceful interlude of *entre deux guerres* (1918-1939), military thought underwent a spectacular transformation. Obsessed by the stalemate of trench warfare, military chiefs elaborated strategies based on new armed mobility, armour and aviation, with the capacity to strike the enemy from a distance and on large open terrain.¹³ Consequently, war technology development received a new input. With the prospect of a second international conflict on the horizon; entire social groups of the major powers were asked to contribute to a previously unheard of great economic and industrial effort.¹⁴ From 1939, a more total form of war was to be realised.¹⁵ The use of strategic bombing, which aimed to destroy the enemy's economic and industrial resources, resulted in the massive involvement of the civilians in the countries at war and in claiming an infinite number of victims. Finally, with the launch of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, conventional war appeared to have reached a point of no return. Peace, the result of the fear of unimaginable destruction, seemed to be close at hand for the first time in history.

From Cosmic Terror to Daily War

Today, we know that it was nothing but an illusion. According to a rough but meaningful estimate, the number of victims due to armed conflict in the world, since 1945, is the equivalent of those who died in the First World War, more than twenty million.¹⁶ Even if we leave aside the uncountable local and regional conflicts in Africa,

13 Basically, the principle of strategic dynamism replaced static conflict. No longer was it the plan to destroy the enemy forces in a decisive battle, which was the cause of the stalemate in trench warfare, but to paralyse the adversary with mobile forces, even numerically inferior, with the task of cutting off the enemy and to hit the enemy's nerve centres (See Hart, 1970). Liddell Hart, who is seen as the father figure of mobile warfare, tends to underline the importance of the *Blitzkrieg*. As I will show later, we are dealing with a classic over-evaluation of strategic theory. Anyhow, the conventional way of warfare in the 1930s is still the bedrock of warfare today. It is based on the mobility of the forces, the integration of ground strikes (armoured divisions) and air and sea strikes; see Hart (1967). As far as strategic bombing is concerned, one of the greatest in this subject is the Italian Douhet (1932). The best overall essay on the evolution of warfare in the first half of the 20th century, in my opinion, is Crevald (1991).

14 The main work on this subject remains Various (1978).

15 Ludendorff (1936/1986) can be seen as the first attempt to draw together all the military innovations of the Great War. As I will demonstrate later, we are dealing with largely ideological contributions, understandable within the revanchist and nationalist context of Germany between the wars. On the other hand, the unsurpassed theoretical expression about these changes is in the works of E. Jünger. Even though he was influenced by trench warfare experiences, he knew how to single out the crossover of war and social life, peacetime and wartime economics, which were central themes during the period of all-out war, under a different guise in our terms, permanent war, both endemic and ubiquitous. See Jünger (1980); see also in Italian Jünger (1984) and the collection of essays in *Scritti politici e di guerra, 1919-1933*.

16 See Sivard (1996). In my opinion, the total is underestimated as the data, updated in 1995, and relates only to the main conflicts, (Korea, Vietnam, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan). It does not take into account national conflicts, some that have lasted for decades (Angola, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Colombia) or others (such as, the Iraq-Iran war), for which there is no precise data. If all recent wars

death from war proliferated. War between Israel and the Arab nations; belated colonial wars in British in Kenya, French Indo-China and Algeria); conflicts between the American and Soviet Empires, or between capitalism and communism (Korea, Vietnam, the Horn of Africa, Angola, Afghanistan and so on) were anything but peaceful. Only Western Europe was sheltered during the Cold War from the effects of direct armed conflict, which has led those nations coming out of the Second World War to cast, with typical Euro-centric effect, their ideas of peace over the rest of the world.¹⁷ This illusion ended after 1989 with the latent disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation and the subsequent explosion of armed conflicts involving the whole of the Balkans. After this, various Western coalitions, led by the United States, intervened in different parts of the world in the name of 'international legality' (Kuwait, 1991), 'humanity' or 'human rights' (Somalia, 1993, Bosnia, 1995, Kosovo, 1999), 'enduring freedom' (Afghanistan, 2001), 'the fight against terrorism' or pure and simple hegemony (Iraq, 2003). After the attack of 11 September, large parts of Western society realised war had reappeared in everyday life.

At this point it is necessary to establish if and how permanent war is changing our lives. One problem is the question of the actual understanding of the *nature* of modern warfare. This is the point of major difficulty for social analysis. The majority of ongoing wars are far from the idea of the typical forms of 20th century warfare. Just one example is enough. In February 1991, when it became clear to all that the coalition, headed by George Bush senior, was going to intervene in order to expel the Iraqi forces from Kuwait, panic spread in some Italian towns and cities. News accounts show that many, above all women and the elderly, invaded supermarkets to buy up foodstuffs for hoarding. The prospect of war brought back wartime memories of over forty-five years before; the ghosts of rationing, air-raid alarms, air raids. After this, despite the increase in 'wars', this type of panic was never repeated. In the spring of 1999, despite some doubts that Serbia might have reacted by launching missiles against the Adriatic coastline, the Western coalition was able to conduct their wars without fearing direct retaliation. During such conflicts, daily Western life continued more or less unchanged. After 11th September 2001 in New York and 11th March 2004 in Madrid, it became clear that war is not restricted to the shadow of terrorism in our lives. It has given rise to a state of *emergency* which, far from establishing a state of exception, has *firmly* reoriented our habits. Some of these changes are obvious to all and can be considered in the form of *higher security*: the tightening of border and airport controls, the strengthening and ubiquity of intelligence, the general suspicion directed against foreigners – especially if they are of North African, Middle East, 'Arab' or 'Muslim' origin. The creation of prison camps for interns deprived of any form of status and hence of any security (Guantanamo, prison camps in Iraq and Afghanistan etc.).¹⁸

were to be included (the Gulf, the Balkans, Chechnya, the American intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Zaire etc.) the figure could come to 30 million out of a total of 120 since the beginning of the 20th century. The most relevant fact is probably the number of civilian casualties. It was just under 50% for the Great War, but rose to 80% for all the wars after 1945.

17 A trap even some respected observers fell into, if only for a short time; see Shaw (1991).

18 This discussion could also take into account the networks of electronic surveillance like the notorious Echelon system and all the agreements that were made concerning intelligence, prevention and controls, by the Western countries; see Campbell (2002).

Other changes, however, are less evident but likely to cause longer lasting effects. They can be listed in the formula of the primacy of *military decisions*. Since 1999, when the war against Serbia was conducted without the approval of the United Nations, the principle of Western military interference all over the world has been fully asserted. The justification or legitimisation of this global policing¹⁹ plays on the threat of terrorism and those who would support it (the so-called *rogue states*, to begin with); but it is, chiefly, self-referential. By assuming that the West practises law on national and international levels, and has the means to apply this, there then are the foundations for a global military force as legitimised by the circumstances.²⁰ Moreover, these circumstances are long-lasting, as any expected opposition to its exercise will be deemed as a form of terrorism. What is more, is the deep significance of the *enduring freedom* slogan or in other words Bush's declarations that the fight against terrorism could last for generations.²¹ The war against terrorism is therefore not founded on any conventional legitimacy, but rather on power and the capacity to intervene, which naturally may be justified by a call to the cultural superiority (economic, social and even military) of 'Western civilisation'.²² Basically, the power of intervention, or war, assumes a *constituent* role and hence is able to reshape world power relations.²³

By saying that war has today assumed a position of power or a constituent role would thereby mean that it is the source of new social and political relations. To start with, aside from the national and international instances, new sets of power have been developed and they are able to change tasks and spheres of intervention. Among these are 'ad hoc' alliances, which fought the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and which act as the armed side of 'international legality' with or without the United Nations' mandate; and the planned European Rapid Intervention Task Force, whose range of action is not limited only to Europe. We can also mention NATO, which in 1999 entered Kosovo. In both cases, these military structures, temporary or permanent though they may be, tend to promote or impose new political and economic organisations in the countries where they have intervened. It is worth just considering the military presence in Afghanistan, the NATO military protectorates in the southern Balkans (Bosnia, Kosovo and to a lesser extent, Macedonia and Albania) or the coalition which is occupying Iraq. The

19 Dal Lago (2003).

20 The notion of West, in the context, is quite conventional. Among these are the United States, Europe and all their allies all over the world. We will see, even by being variable, how the notion of West coincides with that of Western society, in the case of Huntington (1996).

21 The expression 'enduring freedom' is usually translated in Italian as *libertà duratura*. Yet the verb 'to endure' means also, 'to put up with'; so, we could have a slogan 'putting up with freedom'. In conclusion, the enduring war, in Bush's mind, is the price to pay for freedom.

22 According to classical social theory, the legitimisation of a code is the justification of its right to be put into effect. The legitimisation can rest its laurels on tradition, charisma and the legal system. In the case of constituent world power, legitimisation is based on military force, even if intellectuals and scholars see it in terms of civil superiority.

23 Over the last few years, the number of 'revanchist' books have reaffirmed the intrinsic superiority of the West in all types of culture, past or present. Emblematic, in this sense, is Hanson (2001), who confirms Western military supremacy due to rationalism, from Marathon to the Gulf War, and Lander (1999), for whom 'our' economic supremacy is generally a matter of the freedom of initiative. For a critique of this retrospective imperialism Said (1998) is indispensable. An analogous but less explicit sense is the position of Sen (2003).

latter is formed by the armed forces of two nation states that over-ran the Iraqi army in 2003 and by various military contingents from different European, Asian and South American countries, who are charged with the task of military policing. In reality these forces are nothing more than the avant-garde of an occupying organisation comprised of principally private security companies,²⁴ corporations (mostly American) commissioned to rebuild infrastructure and the economic system, and Western State or semi-State agencies (secret services, security advisors, NGOs, etc.) which run the civil machine, from education to the arts. This is a political, economic and administrative occupation that can be legitimised only by the military victory in 2003.

Clausewitz Overturned

This discourse regards war as a phenomenon that is able to transform society in mainly innovative directions. We could express the same concept by defining contemporary war as a 'social system of thought'. This expression is inspired by the work of Michel Foucault and points to a conceptual pattern that does not need to be organic, explicit or represented by the traditional disciplines. It nonetheless is able to orientate the theoretical and practical ways of thinking during a certain era. Foucault brought to the forefront many areas of thought such as the lesser scientific displays contemporary with the age of Enlightenment, the idea of insanity in the Classic Age, the jailor and the Modern Disciplines, the 'will for knowledge' in contemporary sex culture. Most of all, he singled out the essence of the modern military mindset in the 'racism of the state', even though Foucault considered war to still be limited to nation states and to each society, and had yet to extend to trans-national and trans-state dimensions which today come under the banner of the concept of globalisation.²⁵

Foucault insisted on the necessity to overturn Clausewitz's sense of the principle that "war is the continuation of politics by other means".²⁶ For Foucault – as it was also for Schmitt to a certain point – *politics is the continuation of war by other means*. According to Foucault, politics was the parody of a fundamental civil war among social classes, basically between the ruling class and a constitutionally unruly social body. In my opinion this is a position that misinterprets Clausewitz's letter of expression, who considered politics as *foreign policy*, being the relationships between sovereign states.²⁷

24 As we will see, the sell-off of support services to the private sector (logistics, supplies, security, policing, etc), extended also to combat, one of the most innovative aspects of modern warfare; see Schwartz (2003). According to Traynor (2003), the ratio of private soldiers to regular army soldiers in Iraq is about 1 to 10 (during the Gulf War of 1991 it was 1 to every 100). Singer (2003) confirmed the evaluation and estimates the turnover to be about 100 billion dollars a year in this sector. See also d'Eramo (2004).

25 Foucault (1997).

26 With great reluctance Clausewitz's affirmations are cited; see Von Clausewitz (2004: 38). It is symptomatic that the cognition of this important work, the only one that deserves the definition of a general theory of Western Warfare, stops at this point, and does not concern itself with the concept of war as a game, a gamble or non-linear strategy. This second point has caused wide debate that has resulted in even the wildest of theories; see Alberts and Czerwinski (1998); Beckerman (1999).

27 See Pandolfi (2002).

Indeed, today more than ever, it is impossible to assume a clear distinction between national and foreign policy. And this not because of the loss of the nation states' strength. Rather, it is due to the reorganisation of the nation states into constellations or coalitions, more or less variable, which intervene on the world scene for the purpose of supremacy. In other words, it is possible to re-translate Foucault's (free) version of Clausewitz's maxim with the following concept: *world politics is the continuation of global warfare by other means*. Fundamentally, the existence of a dimension of *continuum* can be established, even if it is clearly articulated, of war and world politics.²⁸

Foucault's method allows us to be free of the prejudice that warfare is an anomaly, the detour from humanity's straight and narrow walk, the emergence from an anti-progressive irrationality, the outbreak of obsolete drives and so on.²⁹ Naturally, there is something suggestive in these judgements – at least when placed at the individual level of combatant and the horrors he participates in. Yet things appear somewhat different when analysis includes military mechanisms and systems, and their relationship to politics and the global economy. In this case, war seems to be the *other face* of world politics, a system of options without alternatives, but complementary compared to the working of pacific governments. Since the end of the Cold War, military violence – as the imposition of political choice – has become a norm, a daily fact in the evolution of politics. Wars are therefore political in various measures, and aimed at heterogeneous objectives that are not always evident or completely clear within the apparent rationale which had to justify them. War for resources, war to solve the problem of local resistance, war to redefine the areas of influence. That some of these wars have not only not been declared, but also not considered such, simply implies that today the state of war is *omnipresent*.³⁰

And the point is that today the scale is planetary (in principle, each local war has an effect *on the whole world*), and has ripped asunder the Western ideology of marginalizing the role of war in asserting European-American culture. Liberal economic and democratic ideology, according to which the success of Western 'values' – economic wealth, political freedom, representative government, scientific and technological development – were the fruits of an intrinsically superior capacity, and not that of the result of wars over a couple of centuries, which had left millions of dead behind. The deletion of war and its normality from the Social Sciences, from Economic and Political theory, and from absolute Philosophy; the minimising of war in historic discussions as a change to diplomatic-political 'game'. It would be interesting to proceed, in the footsteps of Michel Foucault and Aby Warburg, to an archaeology or a genealogy *of the absence of war* in the self-construction of Western thought. For the occasional intuitions of a Machiavelli or a Schmitt, the tortuous pacifist plans of Kant, Nietzsche's thunderbolts – and even the splendid historic narrations by Foucault or

28 In Foucault's view, war is essentially *regulated*, which, strictly speaking, passes from government to governmentalism, at the point that war loses every sign of exceptionalism; see Foucault (2004a; 2004b).

29 This is mythology, which has been widely undersigned by psycho-analysis; see Pick (1993).

30 And in this way theories can be applied indifferently to complex factors, such as; the economy or natural disasters; see Buchanan (2001).

Deleuze – are not sufficient to absolve the tradition of philosophy from the suspicion of connivance, from a silent approval of war.³¹

The Wonders of Intelligence

By saying that war has assumed more than ever a greater *constituent* importance, would mean recognising not only that socio-political and military planning blend together perfectly, but also, at worst, that the latter influences the rhythm of the former. Here, the discussion is not limited to technology, which has become a part of our daily lives while being of military origin, such as the Internet. It should be enough to think of the victorious modern free-market based society, in which the role of the State is seen as scandalous, and which in the most extraordinary military welfare machine the world has ever known not only survives but even prospers. If Rome, with its thirty Legions at its peak,³² was deemed the most militarised empire in ancient times, and if Frederick II of Prussia, with his army of tens of thousands of men was a State cum military barracks, what can we say about the United States today? The Department of Defence has more than two million servicemen, without taking into account reservists, the National Guard and the many other millions of civilians working for the arms industry. And what about the various millions of gun-bearers for civil reasons like all forms of police or customs officers, who are now enlisted in the never-ending war against terrorism?

The military system, seemingly silent or frozen out in peace-time, and unfurled practically triumphantly in wartime, was taken as a necessary evil until 1989, when conventions, intellectuals, both political and legal, began to crumble, revealing one great battlefield to the world. A vastly changed military scenario, fully prepared for the direction taken by economics and science in the last few decades. To start with, in the 1990s, the technocrat's strategy dream was realised with the adoption of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). In order to understand its meaning, it is important to remember that Western military history is often marked by turning points known as 'revolutions'.³³ By only considering the modern age, these are seen as the widespread diffusion of firearms (16th and 17th centuries), the introduction of the conscript army (between the 18th and 19th centuries), and the adoption of armoured divisions and strategic aviation (the first half of the 20th century). RMA would highlight another turning point, the most radical of all. It not only uses the world as its field of application, but also realises, on paper, the gradual reduction, if not elimination, of the

31 See Dal Lago (2004).

32 At the apogee of the Roman Empire, towards the end of the First century after Christ, the total number of legionaries defending the borders of a territory which stretched from Scotland in the north to Persia in the south-east, was no higher than 180,000 men (Wells, 1992). As we know from Procopio, the Byzantine armies of Justinian, one of the most militaristic emperors, contained no more than 15-20,000 men (see Bréhier, 1949). Until the era of the Napoleonic armies, European forces rarely went above 30-40,000 units, which was considered the best size (Keegan, 1997.) It is true that an army's dimensions are immeasurable, however, after leaving aside the two World Wars, the 20th century saw an incredible expansion of the military machine. The 1991 anti-Iraq coalition was made up of almost 700,000 men, two thirds were support staff.

33 For a summary of the problem, see Preston and Wise (1973); Hale (1987); Parker (1999).

element of the human combatant. The strategic nucleus of RMA is fundamentally based upon the application of new information technology (computers, communications, robotics) in military sectors where the human element has been of major relevance: data collection about the terrain and combat. The flesh-and-bones soldiers would be progressively replaced by automated data systems (*infowar*) and the major employment of aerial warfare to neutralise enemy forces.³⁴

The second Gulf War in 1991³⁵ therefore represents a transition from the 20th century warfare to the RMA. Although the communications networks and air defences (as well as the Iraqi land defences) were completely neutralised by the allies, the ground forces (armoured divisions and troops) were commanded to ‘finish the job’ and to ‘clean up’ Kuwait of Saddam Hussein’s troops. The incredible inequality in losses calculated (little less than 300 for the allies and tens of thousands for the Iraqis) gave rise to the illusion that the incomparable superiority of Western aviation, missile systems, and information technology would have put ground warfare on the sidelines. Even the last mentioned, based on the integration of armoured divisions and aviation strategy (flying gun-ships, combat helicopters), would have become a formality. Straight after the Gulf War the ideology was born of war with ‘zero losses’ (Western), alongside the propaganda of intelligent missiles that would cause few victims (‘collateral damage’) among the civilian population (war with ‘zero human cost’). The height of RMA (a mix of utopia and propaganda) came during the war in Kosovo in 1999, where for the first time ever in the history of a NATO attack there was no loss of personnel and only a few hundred (in reality, some thousands) civilian casualties, among the Serb-Yugoslavs.

At the same time the concept of ‘asymmetric’ warfare was born. Among the greater visionary theorists in America, there began to circulate the idea of the abandonment of conventional or traditional warfare by the enemy. The asymmetric response would consist of networked warfare (*netwar*), where small terrorist cells, independent and without a central command, search to strike nerve centres of the West or the United States, according to the well-known rule of *swarming*, by moving separately to hit together.³⁶ Undoubtedly the American strategists had Al Qaeda in mind from the beginning, as they knew it well, having been directly or indirectly involved in its creation. The basic principle is to fight terrorist warfare with counter-guerrilla warfare *based on the same strategic tactics*.³⁷ The first response to the 11th September, which

34 See De Landa (1996).

35 Conventionally, the first Gulf War is seen as the one between Iraq and Iran (1979-1988).

36 See Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2000); Edwards (2000). It is worth noting the hyper-theoretical nature and even utopian character of these theories in that ‘swarming’ is seen as a somewhat timeless tactic and so consequently classic strategic ideas, even ancient ones, are used in the modern hyper-context. On the other hand, this is a further example of the self-referring character of strategic discourse. No matter, it is still true that alongside the theories of ‘great strategy’ there is even in the more distant tradition, a remarkable amount of ‘small wars’, border wars, anti-insurrection wars etc, which began in Byzantine times, who had to face unusual and unconventional fighters like the Turks, the Arabs etc. See: the *Strategikon* of Emperor Maurice and the *Taktika* by Emperor Leo VI the Wise. Large swathes of these works have come back into fashion in the USA, and can be found in Chaliand (1990). Other examples are in Albin and Maltese (2004).

37 Literature on this matter is ample. For a recent review, see Berkowitz (2003). The thought that war evolves in this way is quite controversial. For a traditional point of view, see Gray (1999).

had been widely predicted by USA analysts even though they were not able to pinpoint that attack, was the 2002 war in Afghanistan, where RMA seemed to have found its complete application: strategic bombardment of Taliban and Al Qaeda sanctuaries, delegating to the Northern Alliance the dirty work (the destruction of the Taliban on open terrain), the use of tiny swarming units of counter-guerrilla warfare (CIA and British agents, the Rangers, Delta Force, British experts etc.) against Al Qaeda in the mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The American and British decision in March 2003 to invade Iraq with a relatively 'light' force was due not only to the hurry and mistaken military evaluations (nobody was able to foresee the Iraqi's decision to hold back its troops from direct combat in light of the known outcome and to wait to fight after the 'victory'), but also the overenthusiastic belief in the new way of fighting a war. Convinced that the 1991 victory and successive embargo would have wiped out any possible resistance, plus the customary and devastating air attack, the Americans and British set out on a task that revealed itself to be ultimately more difficult.³⁸ It is then necessary to measure the gap between theoretical strategy and practical application. The divergence depends on the clashes between both the civilian advisors (fundamental in the American decision-making system) and the military hierarchy, and between the opposing strategic schools as in the case of the latter. As a tendency, the military hierarchy is much more cautious in espousing futuristic tactical stratagems and more tied to a traditional military culture. There are signs of two revealing conflicts. The first, at the time of the aerial war in Kosovo, caused the removal of General Wesley Clark,³⁹ who strongly upheld the need for a ground operation in Kosovo; the second, between the American Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defence, Rumsfeld. The military believed, reasonably, that the invasion of Iraq had been prepared in a rush and that the almost three hundred thousand who took part (a third of whom were the combat force) would not be sufficient to maintain order after the capture of Baghdad.⁴⁰ All this shows that RMA is only a theoretical horizon, and quite controversial, from which we must not draw any conclusions over the long term evolution of modern warfare.⁴¹

The actual method of making war appears to be open to a range of mainly political options, often contradictory and widely fortuitous. But this does not mean having to admit that there is no solution to the radical continuity between the choice of war and peace in the hegemonic American system. The failed stratagem in Iraq largely

38 It is surprising that a famous respected historian like John Keegan (2004) not only supported the war in Iraq, but also claimed that it was well-planned victorious.

39 See Clark (2004); Daalder and O'Hanlon (2000).

40 Just before the beginning of the war in Iraq, a drastic confrontation of the Bush-Rumsfeld doctrine was published on the US Army War College review, the most prestigious academic institution of the American army (see Record, 2003a). Later on, the same author sternly criticized the war management in Iraq (see Record, 2003b). This essay, published by a military institution, had a great impact on the American press and contributed to dismantling the myth of 'mission accomplished'.

41 We are under the impression that RMA is evaluated from the 'visions' of its theorists more than from an analysis of its actual impact. Exemplary in this case is the sensationalist diffusion in Italy by Rapetto and Nunzio (2001). An analogous case is the Chinese lifting of RMA's secrets. Some years ago the media reported the USA military's concern, due to a publication of a paper by two Chinese air-force officers (see Liang and Xiangsui, 2001).

conditioned the elections in November 2004 (which was not a referendum for peace but the *optimal* way to conduct the war), so the selection of Bush will bring about new military options. These, in turn, are not to be excluded but co-exist in a scenario where the military machine is always ready to act as the armed part of the ruling party.

The Civilisation of War

That war plays an important role has an even wider sense, as it influences global structures of culture. Let's consider the sphere of the mass media. Even though it seems pluralist at a world level, as it is spread through uncountable local and domestic spheres, global media is actually influenced by a relatively limited number of sources and television or press agencies, which are in Western hands, principally American ones. In times of international crisis, even television companies that enjoy a reputation for impartiality (as in the case of CNN and Fox TV) depend on the majors who are very close to the American political-military establishment. Furthermore, the 11th September 2001, caused the alignment of almost all Western media companies to the American government's position, in the name of patriotism or in the defence of our civilisation. On the other hand, since information became an essential part of military strategy, the media have actually signed up in the West's armed forces, which makes independent coverage of wars impossible.⁴² In 1991, the Chief of Staff of the Coalition banned the free movement of correspondents in the theatre of operations. In 2003, journalists were *embedded*, as such put in uniform and seconded to units far from the lines. Alternative or independent information was discouraged by brisk and anyhow military means. In 1999, at the time of Kosovo, Serbian television was destroyed by a rocket attack, while in Iraq several media troupes from Arab media, like Al Jazeera and the television of Abu Dhabi, were repeatedly targeted by the Americans during the capture of Baghdad.⁴³

The militarization of information does not necessarily contradict the apparent pluralism in the media adapted to a global market society. It responds intermittently to the phases of mobilisation and to the climax of wars. Furthermore, this is extended to the ordinary processes that leak out the news, giving them a worldwide importance or reducing them or making them disappear to the bottom of the media pile. Even with the lack of *Diktat* by the military or politicians, news that contradicts the official *political* truth will vanish, simply for the reason that no news agency will be interested in taking them up.⁴⁴

42 The manipulation of information as a weapon of global warfare is theorised by Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1997). The Gulf War is probably the most sensational example of military *fabrication* before the question of Saddam's 'weapons of mass destruction' were the reason for *casus belli* in 2003. From the invention of the crimes committed by the Iraqis in Kuwait up to the censorship of military operations, all information on the war was manipulated by the main coalition State (see MacArthur, 1992).

43 An excellent and very well documented discussion about propaganda and communication strategies of the modern warfare is by Rampton and Stauber (2003).

44 See Lydersen (2003). The following are examined: for example, the data on the casualties, civil and military, of the war in Iraq. After a year and a half of war, the dead for the coalition are over 1.200, of whom 1.000 after the 'victory' in 2003. This is an official figure (Pentagon) which does not include the deceased after the evacuation from Iraq and mercenaries or the 'security personnel' estimated at about 10% of the operative forces. It is reasonable to admit that the number of dead of the fighting

Given the amount of information theoretically available, news is only news when it is *politically* supported, or in other words when it is made, filmed or corroborated by the recognised authorities on the world scene. The American government has made the world believe the Iraqis were able to hit the West with weapons of mass destruction, only because after 11th September they recognized themselves as having some sort of claim or right to the truth.⁴⁵

The influence of war on culture is demonstrated on a wider scale by the simple imposition of an agenda between the media and politics. If Western leaders (apart from the most amateurish, like Berlusconi) can demonstrate caution in establishing the equivalent relation terrorism-Arab world or world subversion-Islam, this does not take place among their various advisors, the more influential intellectuals or columnists whose purpose it is to stir the waters in order to sell papers or books. Huntington's essay on the 'clash of civilisations', which was aimed at an educated public, or the obscurantist pamphlets by Fallaci, which were aimed at the general public, confirm the opinion that there is an ongoing war between cultures and religions, or even a general terrorist attack against the West. It makes not the slightest difference that this is not a wide-held opinion, as is suggested in the polls of international research organisations such as Euro barometer. Diffusion by the pop media is enough to build the foundation for governments to justify, explicitly or implicitly, their strategies.

The militarization of culture can be expressed in different ways of thinking that do not always need explicit expression. In any form of war, the enemy loses every specific connotation in order to become the exclusive target to be aimed at.⁴⁶ Nowadays, the generalisation of hostility apparent in contemporary wars – the terrorist refers to the Arab or the Muslim, the rogue State to all of its population, etc. – means that a significant portion of humanity is a potential target and hence dehumanised. Here arises the notable indifference towards the destiny of those populations involved in contemporary wars, when oneself is or feels to be at war. Few voices are raised to denounce the harm of the UN embargo on Iraq after 1991, which caused, directly or not,

forces in the alliance is more than 1,500. This would be a figure, *if it became news*, that would attract the world's attention (and especially the American nation's) regarding the mismanagement of the occupation after the easy victory, or pseudo-war, in the spring of 2003. For much less, meaning the loss of about twenty rangers in Mogadishu during the failed attempt to capture two right-hand men of Aidid, Bill Clinton withdrew the USA forces from Somalia (see Bowden, 2002; Rizzoli, 2002 and Halberstam, 2001). But this data is not newsworthy, simply because the world media *does not make it news*. It is difficult that the data, easily obtainable from sites belonging to peace organisations or independent research groups will come out of the Net, where it is viewable to thousands of surfers. Internet, in any case, is not a stage for world information, even if at times (like the mobilisation against the G8 or for pacifism) it aids the global spread of information. The Net, basically, can move important sectors, even those minor, of world public opinion, but cannot impose certain news onto the political-media agenda which remains dominated by information weapons like the television or the huge press groups.

45 Even after the story of the arms of Saddam was proven to be unfounded, the media close to the American establishment tend to absolve Bush, or rather the government, blaming it all on the lower ranks or on bad advisors (see Hosenball, Isikoff and Thomas, 2003).

46 It is quite easy to show that this perspective based on fear makes fragile the system supporting it, implying that today the United States has to permanently have its finger on the trigger; see Joxe (2004).

death from malnutrition and the lack of cure for a million and a half people. Likewise, few people cared much for the civilian victims of Western military action in Somalia, Kosovo, Serbia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Slaughter, torture, concentration camps and civil suffering are solely brought to light when the West is not involved.⁴⁷ As observed by Derrida, actual political-military terminology reduces enemies to targets making them either enemies of humanity (terrorists, rogues, bandits, criminals, when playing an active role) or inert material, animals or things, especially when taking into consideration 'other' populations involved in our wars.⁴⁸

The demotion of the enemy holds varying notions. It starts with the 'ad hoc' creation of categories. The 'enemy combatant', defined the 'terrorists' who were captured in Afghanistan or elsewhere and then imprisoned at the American base of Guantanamo.⁴⁹ There has been no war since 1991 where the winners have even bothered to evaluate civilian casualties. The use of the expression 'collateral damage' in order to indicate civilian casualties of bombing perfectly highlights the equalling of 'other' human beings to simple things fatally drawn into the war. This policy is completely in line with the present military practice of 'indiscriminate response', which purely and simply establishes a linguistic extension. When a Western fighting unit is attacked, the reaction is to burn all around. As long as the enemy is and always will be a terrorist, then the aim will be to destroy his habitat and therefore to hit not only 'anything that moves' but also the population amongst which he could be hiding. The tactics of urban warfare in Mogadishu (1993), in Palestine, Chechnya and today in Iraq are basically the same.⁵⁰ Regular armed forces have the tendency of hitting civilian targets, by bombing the sanctuaries of terrorists or guerrillas⁵¹ located in urban dwellings, and so looking to 'wipe out' any form of support, actual or otherwise, for the enemy. In this way, Western tactics are substantially a *mirror image* of those of the terrorists, whose aim it is to involve the civilians in order to mobilise them against the West.

As has already been shown, we are dealing with a clear case of *asymmetric* war, which can be defined as a conflict where the well-equipped part of an overwhelming force tries to destroy an infinitely weaker enemy fighting in an unconventional and 'incorrect' way.⁵² However, the asymmetry has significance beyond the military aspect. In general, when the West fights it could be considered an *anthropological* asymmetry. The military definition of the enemy as a barbarian or criminal overrides any recognition of

47 This is short-sightedness, more cultural than moral, which seems to be prevalent in all the different literature about the forms of genocide, as if the 'democracies' were naturally immune to these practices. See, for example, Power (2002), where the United States is given the right to intervene in any part of the world in order to punish or prevent genocide. The direct or indirect involvement of the West in genocides in the 20th century is clear in Ternon (1997).

48 Derrida (2003).

49 Bonini (2004).

50 Desh (2001) deals with the insurmountable difficulties of urban fighting for a conventional army, even if equipped with the most sophisticated weapons.

51 The fact that the fighting enemies are rarely defined as 'guerrilla fighters' gives an idea of the depreciation of the opponent. This turns out into a weakening of the anti-guerrilla tactics, because it denies a real understanding of the motivations, way of thinking and thus of fighting the enemy. In relation to this see Beckett (1991).

52 For this definition, see Metz (1997).

his status as a combatant. Accordingly, he is seen as a mere *technical* problem, comparing him to a disaster or a natural plague, like an epidemic.⁵³ On the surface it seems to be the racist model of the colonial wars and in the conquests, as in extreme examples like the act of aggression by Italy in Ethiopia in 1936 and the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1942. However, unlike the 1930s and 1940s, no theory concerning the inferiority of races is necessary to justify the use of asymmetric warfare today. As long as it is believed that our culture is the only (legitimate) one, the others will always be regarded as lacking in culture or as bearers of abnormal cultures, cultural monsters (as in the case of fundamentalism). *Therefore, asymmetric warfare is not fought against various men but against non-men.* In this way, the treatment of the enemy is racist in a hyperbolic sense, as it does not assume racial inferiority but his complete elimination from humankind beforehand.

It is necessary to read between the lines of their words to realise that the advisors of the American prince are well aware of the racist characteristic of contemporary conflicts. The 'right to make war' today is proclaimed on the basis of *absolute* cultural superiority. The 'barbarisation' of the enemy has enabled a wide consensus in the Western world – consensus for permanent conflict, consensus without reference to justice, to conventions or to the binding force of international rights. In this field, the only formality present is in *justifying* for higher means (the defence of our civilisation), which is measured by the interment of enemy prisoners in camps devoid of any form of controls, the systematic use of torture and the use of weapons of mass destruction.

If this is the reality, then it will be necessary to start with the assumption that we do not have sufficient theoretical tools in order to picture the developments and even worse the ability to prefigure the ways out. A political thought based on the central idea of warfare as part of the present world system is in its infancy. On the one hand, there is no full awareness of the role war played or is playing in the rise of Western hegemony around the globe. On the other hand, it is empirically simple to identify the military display of Western supremacy and its expansion, where obscurity or confusion reigns concerning *opposition to such supremacy*. According to Carl Schmitt (who took to the extreme the Weberian definition of the State as holder of the monopoly of violence), the state of exception is the criteria which a State can structurally take on to eliminate a situation of civil war on the *inside*. It is difficult to comprehend how such concept can be extended to a planetary level, since *never* has it been wholly governed by a legitimate or an illegitimate monopolistic force. *Violence and war are not the derivation of a legitimate order, but the conditions of the use of power on the international scene.* This is what today we are observing as a new type of *normality*. We are not dealing with the mere matter of terminology, but quite simply of the close connection between war and political economy in our globalised world.

Until the world economy is based upon what Weber described as the economic struggle for existence, atrocious and without compassion, which the bourgeoisie define as 'the peaceful work of civilisation', war, in any form – traditional or otherwise – will be the interface of global social life. For us, who live within the safe confines of the empire, we are dealing mainly with the embedding of paranoia in culture and the echoes of

53 Tucker (1999).

distant rumbles. For everybody else, real or virtual enemies, only the concrete possibility of destruction and death. Let's not pretend that a global movement against war, able to neutralise the militaristic nature of the Imperial powers, is little more than Utopia. It is up to us, the unruly people of the empire, through our political and theoretical duties, to start dismantling the global racism that has been built up and which is ever more being characterised in the plan.

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