

BOOK ONE

On the Nature of War

CHAPTER ONE

What Is War?

1. INTRODUCTION

I propose to consider first the various *elements* of the subject, next its *various parts or sections*, and finally *the whole* in its internal structure. In other words, I shall proceed from the simple to the complex. But in war more than in any other subject we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole; for here more than elsewhere the part and the whole must always be thought of together.

2. DEFINITION

I shall not begin by expounding a pedantic, literary definition of war, but go straight to the heart of the matter, to the duel. War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his *immediate* aim is to *throw* his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance.

War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.

Force, to counter opposing force, equips itself with the inventions of art and science. Attached to force are certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning, known as international law and custom, but they scarcely weaken it. Force—that is, physical force, for moral force has no existence save as expressed in the state and the law—is thus the *means* of war; to impose our will on the enemy is its *object*. To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare. That aim takes the place of the object, discarding it as something not actually part of war itself.

3. THE MAXIMUM USE OF FORCE

Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst. The maximum use of force is in no way incompatible with the simultaneous use of the intellect. If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it

involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent toward extremes, and the only limiting factors are the counterpoises inherent in war.

This is how the matter must be seen. It would be futile—even wrong—to try and shut one's eyes to what war really is from sheer distress at its brutality.

If wars between civilized nations are far less cruel and destructive than wars between savages, the reason lies in the social conditions of the states themselves and in their relationships to one another. These are the forces that give rise to war; the same forces circumscribe and moderate it. They themselves however are not part of war; they already exist before fighting starts. To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to logical absurdity.

Two different motives make men fight one another: *hostile feelings* and *hostile intentions*. Our definition is based on the latter, since it is the universal element. Even the most savage, almost instinctive, passion of hatred cannot be conceived as existing without hostile intent; but hostile intentions are often unaccompanied by any sort of hostile feelings—at least by none that predominate. Savage peoples are ruled by passion, civilized peoples by the mind. The difference, however, lies not in the respective natures of savagery and civilization, but in their attendant circumstances, institutions, and so forth. The difference, therefore, does not operate in every case, but it does in most of them. Even the most civilized of peoples, in short, can be fired with passionate hatred for each other.

Consequently, it would be an obvious fallacy to imagine war between civilized peoples as resulting merely from a rational act on the part of their governments and to conceive of war as gradually ridding itself of passion, so that in the end one would never really need to use the physical impact of the fighting forces—comparative figures of their strength would be enough. That would be a kind of war by algebra.

Theorists were already beginning to think along such lines when the recent wars taught them a lesson. If war is an act of force, the emotions cannot fail to be involved. War may not spring from them, but they will still affect it to some degree, and the extent to which they do so will depend not on the level of civilization but on how important the conflicting interests are and on how long their conflict lasts.

If, then, civilized nations do not put their prisoners to death or devastate cities and countries, it is because intelligence plays a larger part in their methods of warfare and has taught them more effective ways of using force than the crude expression of instinct.

The invention of gunpowder and the constant improvement of firearms are enough in themselves to show that the advance of civilization has done nothing practical to alter or deflect the impulse to destroy the enemy, which is central to the very idea of war.

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The thesis, then, must be repeated: war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes. This is the *first case of interaction and the first "extreme"* we meet with.

4. THE AIM IS TO DISARM THE ENEMY

I have already said that the aim of warfare is to disarm the enemy and it is time to show that, at least in theory, this is bound to be so. If the enemy is to be coerced you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of that situation must not of course be merely transient—at least not in appearance. Otherwise the enemy would not give in but would wait for things to improve. Any change that might be brought about by continuing hostilities must then, at least in theory, be of a kind to bring the enemy still greater disadvantages. The worst of all conditions in which a belligerent can find himself is to be utterly defenseless. Consequently, if you are to force the enemy, by making war on him, to do your bidding, you must either make him literally defenseless or at least put him in a position that makes this danger probable. It follows, then, that to overcome the enemy, or disarm him—call it what you will—must always be the aim of warfare.

War, however, is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass (total nonresistance would be no war at all) but always the collision of two living forces. The ultimate aim of waging war, as formulated here, must be taken as applying to both sides. Once again, there is interaction. So long as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear he may overthrow me. Thus I am not in control: he dictates to me as much as I dictate to him. This is the *second case of interaction and it leads to the second "extreme."*

5. THE MAXIMUM EXERTION OF STRENGTH

If you want to overcome your enemy you must match your effort against his power of resistance, which can be expressed as the product of two inseparable factors, viz. *the total means at his disposal and the strength of his will*. The extent of the means at his disposal is a matter—though not exclusively—of figures, and should be measurable. But the strength of his will is much less easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it. Assuming you arrive in this way at a reasonably accurate estimate of the enemy's power of resistance, you can adjust your own efforts accordingly; that is, you can either increase them until they surpass the enemy's or, if this is beyond your means, you can make your efforts as great as possible. But the enemy will do the same; competition will again result and, in pure theory, it must again force you both to extremes. This is the *third case of interaction and the third "extreme."*

6. MODIFICATIONS IN PRACTICE

Thus in the field of abstract thought the inquiring mind can never rest until it reaches the extreme, for here it is dealing with an extreme: a clash of forces freely operating and obedient to no law but their own. From a pure concept of war you might try to deduce absolute terms for the objective you should aim at and for the means of achieving it; but if you did so the continuous interaction would land you in extremes that represented nothing but a play of the imagination issuing from an almost invisible sequence of logical subtleties. If we were to think purely in absolute terms, we could avoid every difficulty by a stroke of the pen and proclaim with inflexible logic that, since the extreme must always be the goal, the greatest effort must always be exerted. Any such pronouncement would be an abstraction and would leave the real world quite unaffected.

Even assuming this extreme effort to be an absolute quantity that could easily be calculated, one must admit that the human mind is unlikely to consent to being ruled by such a logical fantasy. It would often result in strength being wasted, which is contrary to other principles of statecraft. An effort of will out of all proportion to the object in view would be needed but would not in fact be realized, since subtleties of logic do not motivate the human will.

But move from the abstract to the real world, and the whole thing looks quite different. In the abstract world, optimism was all-powerful and forced us to assume that both parties to the conflict not only sought perfection but attained it. Would this ever be the case in practice? Yes, it would if: (a) war were a wholly isolated act, occurring suddenly and not produced by previous events in the political world; (b) it consisted of a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones; (c) the decision achieved was complete and perfect in itself, uninfluenced by any previous estimate of the political situation it would bring about.

7. WAR IS NEVER AN ISOLATED ACT

As to the first of these conditions, it must be remembered that neither opponent is an abstract person to the other, not even to the extent of that factor in the power of resistance, namely the will, which is dependent on externals. The will is not a wholly unknown factor; we can base a forecast of its state tomorrow on what it is today. War never breaks out wholly unexpectedly, nor can it be spread instantaneously. Each side can therefore gauge the other to a large extent by what he is and does, instead of judging him by what he, strictly speaking, ought to be or do. Man and his affairs, however, are always something short of perfect and will never quite achieve the absolute best. Such shortcomings affect both sides alike and therefore constitute a moderating force.

8. WAR DOES NOT CONSIST OF A SINGLE SHORT BLOW

The second condition calls for the following remarks:

If war consisted of one decisive act, or of a set of simultaneous decisions, preparations would tend toward totality, for no omission could ever be rectified. The sole criterion for preparations which the world of reality could provide would be the measures taken by the adversary—so far as they are known; the rest would once more be reduced to abstract calculations. But if the decision in war consists of several successive acts, then each of them, seen in context, will provide a gauge for those that follow. Here again, the abstract world is ousted by the real one and the trend to the extreme is thereby moderated.

But, of course, if all the means available were, or could be, simultaneously employed, all wars would automatically be confined to a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones—the reason being that any *adverse* decision must reduce the sum of the means available, and if *all* had been committed in the first act there could really be no question of a second. Any subsequent military operation would virtually be part of the first—in other words, merely an extension of it.

Yet, as I showed above, as soon as preparations for a war begin, the world of reality takes over from the world of abstract thought; material calculations take the place of hypothetical extremes and, if for no other reason, the interaction of the two sides tends to fall short of maximum effort. Their full resources will therefore not be mobilized immediately.

Besides, the very nature of those resources and of their employment means they cannot all be deployed at the same moment. The resources in question are *the fighting forces proper, the country*, with its physical features and population, and its *allies*.

The country—its physical features and population—is more than just the source of all armed forces proper; it is in itself an integral element among the factors at work in war—though only that part which is the actual theater of operations or has a notable influence on it.

It is possible, no doubt, to use all mobile fighting forces simultaneously; but with fortresses, rivers, mountains, inhabitants, and so forth, that cannot be done; not, in short, with the country as a whole, unless it is so small that the opening action of the war completely engulfs it. Furthermore, allies do not cooperate at the mere desire of those who are actively engaged in fighting; international relations being what they are, such cooperation is often furnished only at some later stage or increased only when a balance has been disturbed and needs correction.

In many cases, the proportion of the means of resistance that cannot immediately be brought to bear is much higher than might at first be thought. Even when great strength has been expended on the first decision and the balance has been badly upset, equilibrium can be restored. The point will be more fully treated in due course. At this stage it is enough to

show that the very nature of war impedes the *simultaneous concentration of all forces*. To be sure, that fact in itself cannot be grounds for making any but a maximum effort to obtain the first decision, for a defeat is always a disadvantage no one would deliberately risk. And even if the first clash is not the only one, the influence it has on subsequent actions will be on a scale proportionate to its own. But it is contrary to human nature to make an extreme effort, and the tendency therefore is always to plead that a decision may be possible later on. As a result, for the first decision, effort and concentration of forces are not all they might be. Anything omitted out of weakness by one side becomes a real, *objective* reason for the other to reduce its efforts, and the tendency toward extremes is once again reduced by this interaction.

9. IN WAR THE RESULT IS NEVER FINAL

Lastly, even the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date. It is obvious how this, too, can slacken tension and reduce the vigor of the effort.

10. THE PROBABILITIES OF REAL LIFE REPLACE THE EXTREME AND THE ABSOLUTE REQUIRED BY THEORY

Warfare thus eludes the strict theoretical requirement that extremes of force be applied. Once the extreme is no longer feared or aimed at, it becomes a matter of judgment what degree of effort should be made; and this can only be based on the phenomena of the real world and the *laws of probability*. Once the antagonists have ceased to be mere figments of a theory and become actual states and governments, when war is no longer a theoretical affair but a series of actions obeying its own peculiar laws, reality supplies the data from which we can deduce the unknown that lies ahead.

From the enemy's character, from his institutions, the state of his affairs and his general situation, each side, using the *laws of probability*, forms an estimate of its opponent's likely course and acts accordingly.

11. THE POLITICAL OBJECT NOW COMES TO THE FORE AGAIN

A subject which we last considered in Section 2 now forces itself on us again, namely the *political object of the war*. Hitherto it had been rather overshadowed by the law of extremes, the will to overcome the enemy and make him powerless. But as this law begins to lose its force and as this determination wanes, the political aim will reassert itself. If it is all a calculation of probabilities based on given individuals and conditions, the *political object*, which was the *original motive*, must become an essential factor in the equa-

tion. The smaller the penalty you demand from your opponent, the less you can expect him to try and deny it to you; the smaller the effort he makes, the less you need make yourself. Moreover, the more modest your own political aim, the less importance you attach to it and the less reluctantly you will abandon it if you must. *This is another reason why your effort will be modified.*

The political object—the original motive for the war—will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires. The political object cannot, however, *in itself* provide the standard of measurement. Since we are dealing with realities, not with abstractions, it can do so only in the context of the two states at war. The same political object can elicit *differing* reactions from different peoples, and even from the same people at different times. We can therefore take the political object as a standard only if we think of *the influence it can exert upon the forces it is meant to move*. The nature of those forces therefore calls for study. Depending on whether their characteristics increase or diminish the drive toward a particular action, the outcome will vary. Between two peoples and two states there can be such tensions, such a mass of inflammable material, that the slightest quarrel can produce a wholly disproportionate effect—a real explosion.

This is equally true of the efforts a political object is expected to arouse in either state, and of the military objectives which their policies require. Sometimes the *political and military objective is the same*—for example, the conquest of a province. In other cases the political object will not provide a suitable military objective. In that event, another military objective must be adopted that will serve the political purpose and symbolize it in the peace negotiations. But here, too, attention must be paid to the character of each state involved. There are times when, if the political object is to be achieved, the substitute must be a good deal more important. The less involved the population and the less serious the strains within states and between them, the more political requirements in themselves will dominate and tend to be decisive. Situations can thus exist in which the political object will almost be the sole determinant.

Generally speaking, a military objective that matches the political object in scale will, if the latter is reduced, be reduced in proportion; this will be all the more so as the political object increases its predominance. Thus it follows that without any inconsistency wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination down to simple armed observation. This brings us to a different question, which now needs to be analyzed and answered.

12. AN INTERRUPTION OF MILITARY ACTIVITY IS NOT EXPLAINED BY ANYTHING YET SAID

However modest the political demands may be on either side, however small the means employed, however limited the military objective, can the process

of war ever be interrupted, even for a moment? The question reaches deep into the heart of the matter.

Every action needs a certain time to be completed. That period is called its duration, and its length will depend on the speed with which the person acting works. We need not concern ourselves with the difference here. Everyone performs a task in his own way; a slow man, however, does not do it more slowly because he wants to spend more time over it, but because his nature causes him to need more time. If he made more haste he would do the job less well. His speed, then, is determined by subjective causes and is a factor in the actual duration of the task.

Now if every action in war is allowed its appropriate duration, we would agree that, at least at first sight, any additional expenditure of time—any suspension of military action—seems absurd. In this connection it must be remembered that what we are talking about is not the progress made by one side or the other but the progress of military interaction as a whole.

13. ONLY ONE CONSIDERATION CAN SUSPEND MILITARY ACTION, AND IT SEEMS THAT IT CAN NEVER BE PRESENT ON MORE THAN ONE SIDE

If two parties have prepared for war, some motive of hostility must have brought them to that point. Moreover so long as they remain under arms (do not negotiate a settlement) that motive of hostility must still be active. Only one consideration can restrain it: *a desire to wait for a better moment before acting*. At first sight one would think this desire could never operate on more than one side since its opposite must automatically be working on the other. If action would bring an advantage to one side, the other's interest must be to wait.

But an absolute balance of forces cannot bring about a standstill, for if such a balance should exist the initiative would necessarily belong to the side with the positive purpose—the attacker.

One could, however, conceive of a state of balance in which the side with the positive aim (the side with the stronger grounds for action) was the one that had the weaker forces. The balance would then result from the combined effects of aim and strength. Were that the case, one would have to say that unless some shift in the balance were in prospect the two sides should make peace. If, however, some alteration were to be foreseen, only one side could expect to gain by it—a fact which ought to stimulate the other into action. Inaction clearly cannot be explained by the concept of balance. The only explanation is that both are waiting for a better time to act. Let us suppose, therefore, that one of the two states has a positive aim—say, the conquest of a part of the other's territory, to use for bargaining at the peace table. Once the prize is in its hands, the political object has been achieved; there is no need to do more, and it can let matters rest. If the other state is ready to accept the situation, it should sue for peace. If not, it must do something; and if it thinks it will be better organized for action

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in four weeks' time it clearly has an adequate reason for not taking action at once.

But from that moment on, logic would seem to call for action by the other side—the object being to deny the enemy the time he needs for getting ready. Throughout all this I have assumed, of course, that both sides understand the situation perfectly.

14. CONTINUITY WOULD THUS BE BROUGHT ABOUT IN MILITARY ACTION AND WOULD AGAIN INTENSIFY EVERYTHING

If this continuity were really to exist in the campaign its effect would again be to drive everything to extremes. Not only would such ceaseless activity arouse men's feelings and inject them with more passion and elemental strength, but events would follow more closely on each other and be governed by a stricter causal chain. Each individual action would be more important, and consequently more dangerous.

But war, of course, seldom if ever shows such continuity. In numerous conflicts only a very small part of the time is occupied by action, while the rest is spent in inactivity. This cannot always be an anomaly. Suspension of action in war must be possible; in other words, it is not a contradiction in terms. Let me demonstrate this point, and explain the reasons for it.

15. HERE A PRINCIPLE OF POLARITY IS PROPOSED

By thinking that the interests of the two commanders are opposed in equal measure to each other, we have assumed a genuine *polarity*. A whole chapter will be devoted to the subject further on, but the following must be said about it here.

The principle of polarity is valid only in relation to one and the same object, in which positive and negative interests exactly cancel one another out. In a battle each side aims at victory; that is a case of true polarity, since the victory of one side excludes the victory of the other. When, however, we are dealing with two different things that have a common relation external to themselves, the polarity lies not in the *things* but in their relationship.

16. ATTACK AND DEFENSE BEING THINGS DIFFERENT IN KIND AND UNEQUAL IN STRENGTH, POLARITY CANNOT BE APPLIED TO THEM

If war assumed only a single form, namely, attacking the enemy, and defense were nonexistent; or, to put it in another way, if the only differences between attack and defense lay in the fact that attack has a positive aim whereas defense has not, and the forms of fighting were identical; then every advantage gained by one side would be a precisely equal disadvantage to the other—true polarity would exist.

But there are two distinct forms of action in war: attack and defense. As will be shown in detail later, the two are very different and unequal in strength. Polarity, then, does not lie in attack or defense, but in the object both seek to achieve: the decision. If one commander wants to postpone the decision, the other must want to hasten it, always assuming that both are engaged in the same kind of fighting. If it is in A's interest not to attack B now but to attack him in four weeks, then it is in B's interest not to be attacked in four weeks' time, but now. This is an immediate and direct conflict of interest; but it does not follow from this that it would also be to B's advantage to make an immediate attack on A. That would obviously be quite another matter.

17. THE SUPERIORITY OF DEFENSE OVER ATTACK OFTEN DESTROYS THE EFFECT OF POLARITY, AND THIS EXPLAINS THE SUSPENSION OF MILITARY ACTION

As we shall show, defense is a stronger form of fighting than attack. Consequently we must ask whether the advantage of *postponing a decision* is as great for one side as the advantage of *defense* is for the other. Whenever it is not, it cannot balance the advantage of defense and in this way influence the progress of the war. It is clear, then, that the impulse created by the polarity of interests may be exhausted in the difference between the strength of attack and defense, and may thus become inoperative.

Consequently, if the side favored by present conditions is not sufficiently strong to do without the added advantages of the defense, it will have to accept the prospect of acting under unfavorable conditions in the future. To fight a defensive battle under these less favorable conditions may still be better than to attack immediately or to make peace. I am convinced that the superiority of the defensive (if rightly understood) is very great, far greater than appears at first sight. It is this which explains without any inconsistency most periods of inaction that occur in war. The weaker the motives for action, the more will they be overlaid and neutralized by this disparity between attack and defense, and the more frequently will action be suspended—as indeed experience shows.

18. A SECOND CAUSE IS IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE SITUATION

There is still another factor that can bring military action to a standstill: imperfect knowledge of the situation. The only situation a commander can know fully is his own; his opponent's he can know only from unreliable intelligence. His evaluation, therefore, may be mistaken and can lead him to suppose that the initiative lies with the enemy when in fact it remains with him. Of course such faulty appreciation is as likely to lead to ill-timed action as to ill-timed inaction, and is no more conducive to slowing down operations than it is to speeding them up. Nevertheless, it must rank among

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the natural causes which, *without entailing inconsistency, can bring military activity to a halt*. Men are always more inclined to pitch their estimate of the enemy's strength too high than too low, such is human nature. Bearing this in mind, one must admit that partial ignorance of the situation is, generally speaking, a major factor in delaying the progress of military action and in moderating the principle that underlies it.

The possibility of inaction has a further moderating effect on the progress of the war by diluting it, so to speak, in time by delaying danger, and by increasing the means of restoring a balance between the two sides. The greater the tensions that have led to war, and the greater the consequent war effort, the shorter these periods of inaction. Inversely, the weaker the motive for conflict, the longer the intervals between actions. For the stronger motive increases willpower, and willpower, as we know, is always both an element in and the product of strength.

19. FREQUENT PERIODS OF INACTION REMOVE WAR STILL FURTHER FROM THE REALM OF THE ABSOLUTE AND MAKE IT EVEN MORE A MATTER OF ASSESSING PROBABILITIES

The slower the progress and the more frequent the interruptions of military action the easier it is to retrieve a mistake, the bolder will be the general's assessments, and the more likely he will be to avoid theoretical extremes and to base his plans on probability and inference. Any given situation requires that probabilities be calculated in the light of circumstances, and the amount of time available for such calculation will depend on the pace with which operations are taking place.

20. THEREFORE ONLY THE ELEMENT OF CHANCE IS NEEDED TO MAKE WAR A GAMBLE, AND THAT ELEMENT IS NEVER ABSENT

It is now quite clear how greatly the objective nature of war makes it a matter of assessing probabilities. Only one more element is needed to make war a gamble—chance: the very last thing that war lacks. No other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance. And through the element of chance, guesswork and luck come to play a great part in war.

21. NOT ONLY ITS OBJECTIVE BUT ALSO ITS SUBJECTIVE NATURE MAKES WAR A GAMBLE

If we now consider briefly the *subjective nature* of war—the means by which war has to be fought—it will look more than ever like a gamble. The element in which war exists is danger. The highest of all moral qualities in time of danger is certainly *courage*. Now courage is perfectly compatible with prudent calculation but the two differ nonetheless, and pertain to different

psychological forces. Daring, on the other hand, boldness, rashness, trusting in luck are only variants of courage, and all these traits of character seek their proper element—chance.

In short, absolute, so-called mathematical, factors never find a firm basis in military calculations. From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry. In the whole range of human activities, war most closely resembles a game of cards.

22. HOW IN GENERAL THIS BEST SUITS HUMAN NATURE

Although our intellect always longs for clarity and certainty, our nature often finds uncertainty fascinating. It prefers to day-dream in the realms of chance and luck rather than accompany the intellect on its narrow and tortuous path of philosophical enquiry and logical deduction only to arrive—hardly knowing how—in unfamiliar surroundings where all the usual landmarks seem to have disappeared. Unconfined by narrow necessity, it can revel in a wealth of possibilities; which inspire courage to take wing and dive into the element of daring and danger like a fearless swimmer into the current.

Should theory leave us here, and cheerfully go on elaborating absolute conclusions and prescriptions? Then it would be no use at all in real life. No, it must also take the human factor into account, and find room for courage, boldness, even foolhardiness. The art of war deals with living and with moral forces. Consequently, it cannot attain the absolute, or certainty; it must always leave a margin for uncertainty, in the greatest things as much as in the smallest. With uncertainty in one scale, courage and self-confidence must be thrown into the other to correct the balance. The greater they are, the greater the margin that can be left for accidents. Thus courage and self-confidence are essential in war, and theory should propose only rules that give ample scope to these finest and least dispensable of military virtues, in all their degrees and variations. Even in daring there can be method and caution; but here they are measured by a different standard.

23. BUT WAR IS NONETHELESS A SERIOUS MEANS TO A SERIOUS END: A MORE PRECISE DEFINITION OF WAR

Such is war, such is the commander who directs it, and such the theory that governs it. War is no pastime; it is no mere joy in daring and winning, no place for irresponsible enthusiasts. It is a serious means to a serious end, and all its colorful resemblance to a game of chance, all the vicissitudes of passion, courage, imagination, and enthusiasm it includes are merely its special characteristics.

When whole communities go to war—whole peoples, and especially civilized peoples—the reason always lies in some political situation, and the

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occasion is always due to some political object. War, therefore, is an act of policy. Were it a complete, untrammelled, absolute manifestation of violence (as the pure concept would require), war would of its own independent will usurp the place of policy the moment policy had brought it into being; it would then drive policy out of office and rule by the laws of its own nature, very much like a mine that can explode only in the manner or direction predetermined by the setting. This, in fact, is the view that has been taken of the matter whenever some discord between policy and the conduct of war has stimulated theoretical distinctions of this kind. But in reality things are different, and this view is thoroughly mistaken. In reality war, as has been shown, is not like that. Its violence is not of the kind that explodes in a single discharge, but is the effect of forces that do not always develop in exactly the same manner or to the same degree. At times they will expand sufficiently to overcome the resistance of inertia or friction; at others they are too weak to have any effect. War is a pulsation of violence, variable in strength and therefore variable in the speed with which it explodes and discharges its energy. War moves on its goal with varying speeds; but it always lasts long enough for influence to be exerted on the goal and for its own course to be changed in one way or another—long enough, in other words, to remain subject to the action of a superior intelligence. If we keep in mind that war springs from some political purpose, it is natural that the prime cause of its existence will remain the supreme consideration in conducting it. That, however, does not imply that the political aim is a tyrant. It must adapt itself to its chosen means, a process which can radically change it; yet the political aim remains the first consideration. Policy, then, will permeate all military operations, and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them.

24. WAR IS MERELY THE CONTINUATION OF POLICY BY OTHER MEANS

We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means. What remains peculiar to war is simply the peculiar nature of its means. War in general, and the commander in any specific instance, is entitled to require that the trend and designs of policy shall not be inconsistent with these means. That, of course, is no small demand; but however much it may affect political aims in a given case, it will never do more than modify them. The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.

25. THE DIVERSE NATURE OF WAR

The more powerful and inspiring the motives for war, the more they affect the belligerent nations and the fiercer the tensions that precede the out-

break, the closer will war approach its abstract concept, the more important will be the destruction of the enemy, the more closely will the military aims and the political objects of war coincide, and the more military and less political will war appear to be. On the other hand, the less intense the motives, the less will the military element's natural tendency to violence coincide with political directives. As a result, war will be driven further from its natural course, the political object will be more and more at variance with the aim of ideal war, and the conflict will seem increasingly *political* in character.

At this point, to prevent the reader from going astray, it must be observed that the phrase, the *natural tendency* of war, is used in its philosophical, strictly *logical* sense alone and does not refer to the tendencies of the forces that are actually engaged in fighting—including, for instance, the morale and emotions of the combatants. At times, it is true, these might be so aroused that the political factor would be hard put to control them. Yet such a conflict will not occur very often, for if the motivations are so powerful there must be a policy of proportionate magnitude. On the other hand, if policy is directed only toward minor objectives, the emotions of the masses will be little stirred and they will have to be stimulated rather than held back.

26. ALL WARS CAN BE CONSIDERED ACTS OF POLICY

It is time to return to the main theme and observe that while policy is apparently effaced in the one kind of war and yet is strongly evident in the other, both kinds are equally political. If the state is thought of as a person, and policy as the product of its brain, then among the contingencies for which the state must be prepared is a war in which every element calls for policy to be eclipsed by violence. Only if politics is regarded not as resulting from a just appreciation of affairs, but—as it conventionally is—as cautious, devious, even dishonest, shying away from force, could the second type of war appear to be more “political” than the first.

27. THE EFFECTS OF THIS POINT OF VIEW ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF MILITARY HISTORY AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THEORY

First, therefore, it is clear that war should never be thought of as *something autonomous* but always as an *instrument of policy*; otherwise the entire history of war would contradict us. Only this approach will enable us to penetrate the problem intelligently. *Second*, this way of looking at it will show us how wars must vary with the nature of their motives and of the situations which give rise to them.

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all

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strategic questions and the most comprehensive. It will be given detailed study later, in the chapter on war plans.

It is enough, for the moment, to have reached this stage and to have established the cardinal point of view from which war and the theory of war have to be examined.

28. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THEORY

War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.

The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people; the scope which the play of courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of probability and chance depends on the particular character of the commander and the army; but the political aims are the business of government alone.

These three tendencies are like three different codes of law, deep-rooted in their subject and yet variable in their relationship to one another. A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless.

Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.

What lines might best be followed to achieve this difficult task will be explored in the book on the theory of war [Book Two]. At any rate, the preliminary concept of war which we have formulated casts a first ray of light on the basic structure of theory, and enables us to make an initial differentiation and identification of its major components.