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THE END OF WARFARE?

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Abstract. *The recent scholarship on warfare has been highly polarised around the question: Is organised violence on the rise or in decline? In this paper I critically examine the two dominant approaches – the new war thesis, and the decline of violence perspective – which offer contrasting answers to this question. The paper challenges both of these perspectives and develops an alternative, longue durée sociological approach, that focuses on the macro-organisational social context and explores the dynamics of the war-state-society nexus over the past centuries. I argue that warfare is not becoming obsolete and that 'new wars' are unlikely to completely replace inter-state warfare. Instead, my analysis indicates that there is more organisational continuity in the contemporary warfare that either of the two dominant perspectives is willing to acknowledge.*

Ключевые слова: *sociology of war • historical sociology • organised violence • war*

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Introduction

Over the last two decades war has become a central analytical concern for a number of sociologists (Wimmer 2013; King 2013; Mann 2012; 1993; Shaw 2005; Malešević 2017, 2010). These studies have provided both theoretical and empirically specific analyses of the relationship between war and society. However, there is still a major lacuna in the sociological understanding of the long-term historical processes that shape the relationship between war and society. It is not completely clear what is happening to contemporary war and what the lasting implications of these social dynamics are. Is organised violence on the rise or in decline?

This paper aims to answer this question. The first part critically assesses the two dominant and contrasting perspectives on the transformation of war both of which insist on the radical change in the character of the relationship between war and society. The second part provides an alternative interpretation that centres on the war-state-society nexus over long stretches of time. The main argument emphasises the role organisational power plays in these historically contingent, but for the most part cumulative and coercive, processes and contends that as long as the organisational capacity of states continues to increase the likelihood of wars becoming obsolete remains minimal.

Understanding Contemporary Warfare: Rise or Decline?

Although there is a general agreement that the institution of warfare is undergoing a substantial transformation it is less clear what the causes and the long-term implications of these

changes are. For one group of scholars the virtual disappearance of inter-state wars and their displacement by civil wars is an indicator of a broader social malaise resulting in the continuous weakening of state power. Thus Bauman (2006, 2002) Munkler (2004) and Kaldor (2013, 2007) argue that contemporary armed conflicts differ significantly from their 19th and early 20th century counterparts: they are decentralised, less restrained, more chaotic, and brutal, less focused on territory and more on the control of population and often characterised by the deliberate targeting of civilians. Furthermore, such conflicts are understood to be generated by the unrestrained proliferation of neo-liberal globalisation which in its constant search for resources, cheap labour and markets helps erode the sovereignty and capacity of many states. In some contexts, this ultimately contributes to the state's loss of monopoly on the legitimate use of violence leading to privatisation of violence and the emergence of rootless paramilitaries who wage wars over the remnants of state structures, scarce resources and people. In contrast to conventional warfare these 'new wars' are seen to be strictly parasitic phenomena whereby greedy warlords politicise ethnic and religious markers and utilise militias to wage genocidal wars on civilians. While the proponents of the new war thesis agree that wars between states have dramatically declined and that battle deaths have substantially decreased, they dispute the findings indicating a similar decline in civilian deaths. On the contrary both Kaldor (2013: 8–10) and Shaw (2005, 2003) argue that it is extremely difficult to gauge and provide reliable evidence on the civilian casualties not least because there are different methods for calculating these figures and many deaths remain unreported and undocumented (especially those that are indirectly caused by war operations such as disease or malnutrition). For example, the civilian death toll of war in Iraq ranges from 100,000 to 1 million depending on the source and methodology used. Furthermore, as the new war thesis is premised on the idea that new forms of warfare blur the distinctions between public and private, legal and illegal and most of all civilian and military, there is no reliable way to distinguish combatants from civilians. Most significantly they argue that the battle death toll is not the only measure that can capture the brutality of new wars. Instead, they show that other indicators such as the forced displacement of people or the proliferation of privatised purveyors of violence are just as reliable in accounting for the changing character of war. For example, UNHCR data shows that in 2010 there were 43.7 million forcibly displaced people, which was the highest figure in the last 15 years (Kaldor 2013:9). When all of this is considered the general argument is that as long as unimpeded neo-liberal globalisation proliferates so will the new forms of war.

In contrast to the new war paradigm other scholars argue that all forms of violence including warfare are in continuous decline. Hence, Goldstein (2011), Pinker (2011), and Muller (2009), insist that one can observe a steady trend in the gradual waning of all forms of warfare, revolutions, genocides, riots, terrorism, and other types of organised violent action. Mueller (1989) was one of the first who articulated this argument with his contention that major wars among large states have become obsolete. In his view 'war is merely an idea' comparable to duelling or slavery all of which have been 'grafted onto human existence' and have gradually become redundant as a mechanism for solving collective disputes (Mueller 1989:321). More recently he has radicalised this idea further, arguing that warfare as an institution 'has almost ceased to exist' (Mueller 2009:297). This argument was further refined and empirically documented by Goldstein (2011) who argues that in the last three decades one could observe fewer outbreaks and more endings of war and that existing wars tend to be more localised, smaller, and shorter than those fought in the previous decades. Nevertheless, the most influential book written in this vein was Pinker's *Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011). Drawing heavily on Elias's (2000) theory of civilizing process Pinker argues that not only warfare but nearly all forms of violence have experienced a dramatic decline from prehistory to the present day. He compares the available data on homicides, torture, human sacrifice, blood feuds, capital punishment, slavery, rape, infanticide, child abuse, inter-state, colonial, post-colonial and civil wars, revolutions, pogroms, and other forms of organised violence and concludes that all types of violence exhibit similar, downward, trajectory. Moreover, unlike most other scholars working

within this paradigm Pinker does not see the 20th century as being the most violent period in human history but instead insists that one should use relative rather than absolute numbers to gauge the level of destructiveness for a particular historical period. Hence, he rates the An Lushan revolt (8th century China) and the Mideast Slave Trade (7th–19th century) as being far ahead in terms of human casualties than the two world wars, Mao's Great Leap Forward and Stalin's purges combined (Pinker 2011:194–6). To account for this trend, he deploys the explanatory apparatus of evolutionary psychology and history of ideas. He maintains that the gradual decline of warfare and other forms of violence is rooted in the inner working of our brain which has an inherent propensity towards violence. As he puts it bluntly: 'most of us-including you, dear reader – are wired for violence' (Pinker 2011:483). This inborn proclivity, in Pinker's view, was gradually tamed by ideological and institutional transformations: the growth of state power, increasing literacy, the development of cosmopolitan and humanitarian worldviews, the expansion of trade and the wider civilising processes all of which have allegedly helped control our violent impulses and have increased the empathetic qualities of modern human beings. Hence for Pinker just as for other representatives of this perspective all forms of war are experiencing a dramatic and potentially irreversible decline.

These two perspectives provide conflicting diagnoses of social reality, so it is not clear what exactly is happening with the institution of warfare. There is no consensus on such questions as: Is war as such becoming obsolete? Are new wars replacing inter-state warfare for good? Is the decline of organised violence a temporary or permanent phenomenon?

Despite some obvious merits neither the new wars thesis nor the decline of violence perspective can provide convincing answers to these questions. As I have argued elsewhere (Malešević 2010) the new war paradigm suffers from economic reductionism which attributes too much power to the forces of neo-liberal globalisation and ignores geo-politics, organisational dynamics, and ideological transformations. This perspective also has a short historical memory: neither globalisation nor privatisation of violence are novel historical processes. In some important economic and political respects, the late 19th and early 20th century was just as globalised as today's world (Conrad 2006; Hall 2000; Hirst et al 2009) but whereas our predecessors were waging numerous colonial and inter-state wars culminating in WWI the scale of today's warfare has been substantially reduced. Hence if the same or similar processes were at work before why are the outcomes so different?

The decline of violence perspective exhibits a different kind of reductionism: it is deeply grounded in idealist epistemology that generates very functionalist arguments. The view that the reduction of human casualties in war, or the diminishing of all types of violence, can be attributed to 'the humanitarian revolution', the gradual expansion of human rights discourses and civilising norms is for the most part un-sociological. While ideas and beliefs play a significant role in social relations, they do not determine long term historical changes. This logic of reasoning cannot explain why the discourses of human rights, moral equality and civilizational advancement have become so influential in today's world but not before, even though they were formulated at the inception of modernity and were in some form of institutional use for the past two hundred years or so. More importantly these norm-centred explanations are prone to functionalist argumentation that regularly end up in tautological conclusions. To explain the decline of war they confuse needs with causes and make explicit what is already present in the premises of this approach. Much of this reasoning is unfalsifiable and not a single author from this tradition has managed to make a direct, causal, link between the post-WWII dominant values and the decline in organised violence (Malešević 2013b, Popper 2005).

The key argument of this paper is that despite some illuminating and valuable insights made by the two dominant perspectives they do not provide adequate analysis of contemporary warfare. As such their forecasts for the future of war do not seem plausible. The most significant weakness of both of these perspectives is the fact that they analyse large scale social transformations without devoting much or any attention to the complex macro sociological processes involved. More specifically to fully understand the character of warfare it is crucial to

utilise a *longue durée* sociological analysis that contextualises the transformation of warfare in broader long term social processes and especially the macro-organisational dynamics that underpin the war-state-society nexus. When contemporary wars are analysed from this long-term perspective it becomes clearer that there is more continuity than discontinuity in the institution of warfare than is recognised by either of the two dominant approaches.

The Historical Sociology of Warfare

In contrast to popular perceptions, shared by socio-biologists such as Pinker (2011), war is, historically speaking, a relatively novel invention. As much of the available archaeological and anthropological evidence indicates, the simple hunter gatherers and other foraging nomadic groupings tended to avoid prolonged inter-group violence and had no organisational, technological, ideological, or environmental means to wage wars (Malešević 2017; Fry and Soderberg 2013; Fry 2007). As recent extensive study of a comprehensive Ethnographic Atlas data set by Fry and Soderberg (2013) demonstrates, most simple hunter-gatherers were not engaged in organised violence. Deaths due to violence are quite rare and when they do occur, they resemble homicides rather than war and other forms of organised violence. For example, in 20 out of 21 cases analysed by Fry and Soderberg 85% of all violent acts undertaken include interfamilial feuds, group centred executions and interpersonal quarrels whereas the cases of inter-group violence are extremely uncommon. As foraging bands are small, non-sedentary, egalitarian and fluid there is no organisational prerequisite to wage wars.

Thus, war emerges on the historical scene together with social development – the rise of stratified group structures, sedentary lifestyles, agriculture, social hierarchies, and division of labour among others. Most of all the proliferation of warfare is closely linked with the emergence of the first stable, territorially focused, polities – chiefdoms, city-states and eventually pristine empires (Mann 1993, Malešević 2010:92–101) all of which have taken root only in the last 12,000 years. Furthermore, from its inception war, state and society have developed and changed together. If one understands war as an instrument of social and political power then as social orders change so does the nature of warfare. It is no accident that both chiefdoms and early pristine empires relied extensively on violent conquests to maintain (and expand) the existing social order. The famous chiefdoms of yesteryear such as those ruled by Arminius or Genghis Khan were despotic and hierarchical but highly unstable polities whose very existence was premised on continuous territorial expansion and war conquests. Similarly the early empires, from Romans, Chinese, Rashiduns, Srivijayas, to Ottomans, were heavily dependent on resources, slaves, serfs and territories to maintain their internal social cohesion and prosperity (Burbank and Cooper 2010). In contrast most city-states were more stable, less hierarchical and, with few notable exceptions such as Sparta or Venice, less conquest prone. In all of these cases polity formation, internal social dynamics and warfare have had a profound and lasting impact on each other. The nature of war has often had significant impact on internal social stratification and vice versa. The protracted, symmetrical and all-encompassing wars stimulated development of citizenship rights and democratic institutions whereas asymmetric and conquest-oriented warfare that utilised armies of the highly skilled warriors and expensive weaponry were more likely to foster hierarchical and highly stratified social orders (Mann 1993; Malešević 2010). For example, both ancient Greece and medieval Switzerland were often hailed as the first examples of participatory citizenship and advanced democratic institutions including their representative popular assemblies such as Greek *ekklesia* and Swiss *landsgemeinde* (Kobach 1993). However, it is often forgotten that this unusual degree of social freedom and popular decision making was built on large scale participation in wars. These were societies composed of self-armed and self-equipped communities of farmers-soldiers who were able and willing to use their arms and military skills to maintain their rights.

War has also played a decisive role in the advent of modernity. As Mann (1993) Giddens (1986) and Hirst (2001) have convincingly demonstrated the intensive preparations for war and the escalation of European warfare since late 16th century onwards provided unprecedented stimulus for state development and social change. The ever-increasing geopolitical competition

forced rulers towards greater fiscal reorganisation, the expansion of administrative structures, the growth of the banking sector, investment in the development of science, technology and the military. The direct corollary of these transformations was the extension of parliamentarism, citizenship rights and greater welfare provisions as the rulers were forced to trade political and social rights for more popular support, increased public taxation and the willingness of citizens to fight in wars. The onset of industrialisation was heavily dependent on the technology pioneered in the military sphere and from the mid-19th century onwards social development in the civilian sector regularly went hand in hand with the industrialisation of warfare (McNeill 1981; Giddens 1986). The two total wars of the twentieth century were a culmination of this ever-expanding link between the state, war and society: mass production, mass politics and mass communications were all mobilized for mass destruction. What started off as a traditional military confrontation was gradually redefined as a vicious conflict to the death between entire populations. Nevertheless, the long-term consequence of these two extremely destructive conflicts were further extension of citizenship rights, greater gender equality, delegitimisation of racism and the establishment of welfare states (Mann 2012). Hence over the past several centuries one could notice the constant increase in the destructiveness of war which was often preceded, or followed by, substantial social changes. However, this continuous increase of synergy between war, state and society cannot easily explain what happened to war over the last sixty years. Does the fact that inter-state wars have dramatically diminished and that human casualties have been substantially reduced suggest that that our age is experiencing a radically different relationship between the state, society and war, as suggested by the two dominant perspectives? The simple answer is: no.

What one can observe when looking historically at the nexus war-state-society is that their dynamics were largely shaped by similar processes over very long stretches of time and this has not substantially changed today. Since for 99% of their existence on this planet humans were nomadic foragers characterised by malleable and weak social ties it took millions of years for rudimentary social organisations to emerge. However once the first elements of social order and statehood developed they tended to arise in tandem with warfare. Hence what is truly distinct about the last 12,000 years is how quickly and forcefully the nexus war-state-society has transformed the face of this planet. One of the key processes spawned by the interplay at this nexus was the continuous expansion of organisational power. Since Weber's early works (1968) analysts have become aware that any effective social action entails the presence of organisations. Nevertheless once in place social organisations are inclined to grow, expand, control its personnel and engage in confrontations with competing social organisations. Hence all influential social organisations have a coercive foundation (Malešević 2013a, 2010). The prevalence of warfare over the past centuries has helped expand and increase the coercive capacity of polities. This process was already visible at the birth of the first empires when the expanding state power depended on the proliferation of 'social caging' with individuals being forced to trade personal liberty for state provided security (Mann 1993). Over the years social caging was combined with 'political racketeering', that is populations being required to pay taxes and finance costly wars in exchange for some citizenship rights and protection from other states and domestic threats. Nevertheless it is only in the past two hundred years that this cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion has significantly accelerated. The transformation of empires, composite kingdoms and city-states into sovereign nation-states was accompanied by technological, scientific and production changes all of which have had an enormous impact on the war-state-society nexus. As wars expanded and became more destructive and costly the organisational power of states and their ability to control their populations grew exponentially. Not only have modern states increased their infrastructural reach and capacity but they have also managed, for the first time in history, to legitimately monopolise the use of violence, taxation, legislation and education (Weber, 1968; Elias 2000; Gellner 1983). The pinnacle of this process were the two world wars. To wage such protracted and costly wars states were forced to further increase their organisational powers including their ability to mobilise millions of individuals to fight or labour for the war effort. The intensive popular mobilisation had long term

effects that galvanised intensive social changes. For example the shortage of manpower on the battlefields fostered the introduction of universal conscription which, among other things, expanded the citizenship and some welfare rights of urban poor and peasantry that could not be easily revoked after the war. In a similar vein the mass deployment of men to fronts and the expansion of war industries caused a shortage of industrial labour. This ultimately compelled state authorities to open up the factories and other industries to women workers thus introducing policies which have profoundly undermined traditional patriarchal relationships. Once women gained economic independence it was extremely difficult to re-establish the gendered status quo. Furthermore the mass war casualties and the war time ideals of national solidarity stimulated gradual delegitimation of the sharp class divides and forced the state authorities to extend welfare policies and health protection in many European and, to lesser extent, North American states. All of these substantial social transformations had a deep impact on post-war states and societies. Despite the enormous human casualties and material destruction post-war social organisations became stronger than ever. The further expansion of science, technology and industry together with the continuous growth of the administrative sector provided impetus to multiply organisational power in a variety of domains. Hence the second half of the 20th century witnessed a dramatic acceleration in the state's ability to collect information on all of its population, to tax its citizens at source, to fully police its borders, to control public education, health sector, employment and immigration policies, to interfere in family and sexual life and to successfully introduce mass surveillance programs (i.e. biometric passports, id cards, birth certificates, census data, CCTV cameras) (Lyon 2001, Mann 2012). It is war that was a prime catalyst of these changes.

The fact that most of Europe, North America and the rest of developed world have not experienced much or any warfare on their soil over the past seven decades might suggest that the war-state-society nexus has been broken or displaced by the less coercive structural mechanisms of development. This, however, is not the case. The immediate aftermath of WWII was not permanent peace but instead a protracted and highly intensive cold war occasionally enhanced by brutal and devastating proxy wars (i.e. Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua) directly supported by the two superpowers. This period (1946–1991) was characterised by the continuous preparation for war together with the political mobilisation of citizenry all of which have helped stimulate further increases in the organisational powers of states. Not only the USA and Soviet Union but all members of the two military alliances utilised military advancements and the perpetual threat of war to increase their organisational power. It was the political and military competition between the two power-blocks that gave impetus to technological, scientific, industrial and state development. As in the previous historical periods most significant scientific and technological inventions were pioneered in the military sector and then gradually found their way into civilian use (Giddens 1986). Despite the lack of human casualties in Europe and North America the proxy wars and the permanent threat of nuclear Armageddon proved to be key organisational devices for substantial social change throughout the world. The cold war was certainly the golden age of economic prosperity, political stability, welfare provisions and social mobility for large sectors of the population on both sides of the political divide (Mann 2012). Just as in the previous three centuries social development, state enhancement and military expansion advanced together. The war-state-society nexus was not significantly dented, it just became accommodated to the different historical constellations.

Whereas the late 20th and early 21st centuries have witnessed some significant changes in the relationship between war, state and society these are far from being radical transformations. In fact these changes indicate the continuous strengthening of the war-state-society nexus and further increase in the cumulative bureaucratisation of coercive power (Malešević 2013b, 2010). The popular view of globalisation as undermining the strength of nation-states and dramatically transforming social relationships between is an overstatement lacking empirical validation (Mann 2012, Hirst et al 2009, Hall 2000). The argument that globalisation inevitably weakens state power is often premised on the idea that before the current wave of globalisation nation-states were

strong and sovereign. However historically nuanced analyses show that for most of the 19th and early 20th century full sovereignty and political independence were largely unachieved ideals, something that most rulers strived for but were unable to achieve. It is only the Great Powers that could attain and afford full state sovereignty and control of their territories whereby most other states did not possess sufficient state capacity for, nor were they allowed to achieve, full sovereignty (Smith 2010). Hence the fact that some states have more political might and independence today than others is not particularly new. In fact it is only in the last few decades that most states have gained so much organisational power that even their strongest 19th century predecessors could not imagine possible. Similarly the pre 2008 economic liberalisation was not profoundly different to its late 19th and early 20th century predecessor and in both of these cases opening up of world markets went hand in hand with the increase in the organisational and coercive potency of the states (Mann 1993, 2012; Conrad 2006, Lachman 2010). Instead of being mutually exclusive forces neo-liberal capitalism and bureaucratisation often underpin one other (Lachman 2010; Hall 2000). Even the appearance of new technologies has not substantially shifted this balance. On the contrary the new technological advancements and inventions – from satellites, internet, mobile phones, robotics, laser weapon systems to nanotechnologies and many others – have helped reinforce the organisational power of states which are now much more able and willing to control and police their borders, populations, tax intake, transgressions of law, immigration, education, sexuality and so many other aspects of everyday life.

The continuous expansion of state power is also followed by the extension of its coercive reach and capacity both internally (policing one's own population) and externally (using military might to shape foreign policy). This growth of organisational strength allows most powerful states to engage in periodic but quite regular military interventions all over the world. Since the end of the cold war the USA, UK, France, Russia, and Israel among others have been involved in a number of wars and military interventions including Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali, Georgia, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, Sierra Leon, Chad, Central African Republic, Ukraine, and Syria. It is true that these military undertakings have generated smaller number of casualties than similar interventions before and during the cold war. However the key point is that analysts' focus should shift from such a crude measure that are military or civilian casualties in direction of whether or not such wars make significant social and political impact. What sociologically matters is not whether a particular war caused more or less damage and human destruction but what kind of social and political change it generates. If viewed through these lenses it is possible to see that much of contemporary warfare has not engendered dramatic social transformations. Neither the so-called high-tech warfare waged by most powerful states nor the predatory civil wars fought by militias and the remnants of state armies have produced historically novel social conditions. The outbreaks of civil war tend to emerge in regions where the existing state structures are already quite weak and are challenged by competing social organisations. These often include not only the neighbouring states, but the domestic competitors also dissatisfied and capable of challenging the weakened state as well as the world powers who pursue their own geo-political ambitions. This obviously is not a historically novel situation. The European state formation went through a very similar process – it started with 1000 polities in the 14th century which by 16th century were reduced to 500 and by the early 20th century the protracted warfare was instrumental in reducing this number to only 25 states (Malešević 2017, 2010). As the running of modern social organisations becomes ever more expensive the state structures that cannot keep up with the demands of cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion often lose their monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. The dominance of civil wars today is not a new phenomenon; they are just more visible as there are no wars between powerful states. What is distinct about these conflicts is that, unlike their 15th, 16th or 18th century European predecessors, most contemporary civil wars cannot be 'played out' to their logical conclusion the outcome of which would be fewer but more powerful states. The main reason why such conflicts are labelled 'civil wars' and contained within the existing state borders is the coercive dominance of international regulations that explicitly prohibit any violent change of interstate

borders. In previous historical periods many wars that started off as intra-state conflicts were later, if and when insurgencies won, redesigned as inter-state wars. However the contemporary geo-political context does not allow for such a transition from civil to inter-state war to occur. In contrast to Mueller and other representatives of the decline of violence perspective who see the existing norms on the sanctity of inter-state borders as a simple reflection of the universally shared Enlightenment principles it is much more plausible to view these rules as something initiated, imposed and policed by the winners of WWII. As such these regulations are the ideological expression of the contemporary geo-political constellations as they firmly reinforce the geo-political status quo.

Although the last twenty years have seen numerous high-tech wars and military interventions waged by powerful states most of these violent conflicts did not generate major social change. The reliance on sophisticated technology, science and industry has reduced the need for the use of mass armies and has led to the abolition of conscription in Europe and North America. Although the introduction of mass conscription gave birth to the welfare state there is no reliable evidence that the ever-increasing professionalization of military directly causes the shrinking of welfare provisions (Lachman 2010). The new technological advancements in military and medicine have also been instrumental in decreasing the number of human casualties among the military personnel of the powerful states. However these changes had very little to do with humanitarian ethics and civilising processes and much more to do with organisational capacity of powerful states to use sophisticated technology to minimise political and military risks. As Shaw (2005) demonstrates much of this warfare is premised on minimizing life-risks to western military personnel by transferring these risks to the weaker enemy. From the Falkland war of 1982 to the 1991 Gulf, 1999 Kosovo, and most recent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Mali the reliance on technologically sophisticated weapons has helped create the systematic transfer of risks from the elected politicians to military personnel and from western militaries to enemy combatants and their civilians. Nevertheless the use of new technology and science did not alter the social and political context of warfare. What in Korean, Vietnam and Soviet war in Afghanistan was pursued relying on the millions of recruits and mass mobilisation of entire societies is now achieved through the use of high-altitude bombing, long distance missile launches, the remotely navigated combat drones, the use of demolition vehicles and other robotic devices.

The Future of War

If the war-state-society nexus has not been significantly weakened why have wars become rarer, and less deadly? And why has inter-state warfare been displaced by civil wars? To answer these questions one needs again to engage with the historical sociology of war and its role in the post-WWII world. When war is conceptualised not as a simple political instrument of rulers but as an outcome of complex and contingent historical processes involving competition between social organisations than its proliferation is heavily dependent on the strength and coercive reach of particular social organisations. The historical record shows that the prevalence and expansion of warfare tends to be linked with the increased capacity of social organisations. Hence scholars have identified several periods of revolutionary acceleration of warfare ranging from southern Mesopotamia in the late 4th and early 3rd millennium, eastern Mediterranean and China at the end of first millennium BE, and the European induced warfare expansion between 1500s and 1945 (Levy and Thompson 2011). In all three of these cases one can witness the significant interplay between war, state development and social transformation. The war-state-society nexus generated unprecedented social changes in military (army sizes, weaponry production) society (greater urbanisation, technological inventions, shift to mass scale production in agriculture and later in industry) and polity formation (greater political centralisation, expanding infrastructural power). The direct outcome of these changes was an escalation in wars as ever-expanding states attempted to establish regional hegemonies and/or prevent other such polities becoming new political hegemonies (Levy and Thompson 2011). In this context the post WWII period is not the end of (war) history. It is just an end of the long-term process that was initiated with the military revolution of early 15th century.

However the relative peace established in Europe and North America in the last several decades still remains grounded in the similar historical processes that have shaped social and political life in the previous centuries – the organisational power and the ability of large scale social organisations such as modern day nation-states to establish their political, economic, ideological and military dominance. During the cold war era the bipolar stability, mutually recognised regional hegemony and the threat of nuclear destruction prevented escalation of violence in the Northern part of the globe. The further decline of inter-state warfare after the Cold war is tightly linked with the unprecedented military supremacy of the USA and the combination of inability and unwillingness of other powerful social organisations (i.e. EU, Russia, China, India) to challenge the US military and political hegemony. For much of the past sixty years American military power has been so overwhelming that no other state, not even the Soviet Union at the peak of its military might, would willingly provoke a war with USA. The military omnipotence of this state is historically unprecedented: this is the only state that has a substantial military presence, including large scale army bases, in more than 150 countries all over the world; the US military budget is larger than the total combined military expenditure of its next ten competitors – China, Russia, UK, France, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Germany and Italy. American airpower is so overwhelming that no other state is anywhere near its technological supremacy; and the US' military technology in laser guided missiles, aircraft carrier ships, re-fuelling facilities, military robotics and many other areas is so far ahead of any other military in the world (Mann 2003). This unparalleled military hegemony remains the cornerstone of contemporary geo-political stability in the world. The US military supremacy averts any attempts to engage in inter-state warfare in the Northern part of the globe and strongly discourages the potential outbreaks of inter-state war within the US's, extremely wide, interest zone. The fact that the American military shield (through NATO or other arrangements) incorporates much of Europe and Japan means that this *Pax Americana* acts as a brake on the escalation of any potential conflicts within its very wide domain. In this sense, as Burbank and Cooper (2010), Munkler (2007) and Mann (2003) remind us US military hegemony in many important respects resembles its imperial predecessors – the military supremacy of the Roman, Mongol and British Empires were decisive in generating extensive periods of peace not so dissimilar to the period we are currently experiencing. Hence it is the geo-political configuration not the humanitarian revolution or civilizational advancement that gave birth to *Pax Romana*, *Pax Mongolica*, *Pax Britannica* just as much as to *Pax Americana*.

Nevertheless what distinguishes the contemporary world from its predecessors is the considerable increase in the organisational capacity of most modern states and other social organisations. Whereas Roman, Mongol and other empires usually waged wars against polities with feeble organisational power most contemporary states possess high infrastructural capacity which makes any potential inter-state war extremely costly and difficult to fight. Unlike their patrimonial counterparts which in most important respects were puny leviathans most present day states are built around bureaucratic principles that foster the continuous expansion of their coercive capacity and reach (Malešević 2017, 2010). For example while the Roman Empire could subdue relatively quickly and cheaply the chiefdoms and composite kingdoms of Sabines, Etruscans, Goths, Illyrians, or Galls the late 20th and 21st century inter-state wars, typified by Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), are extremely destructive, costly and difficult to win. Nevertheless it is important to emphasise that the ever increasing organisational power is not just confined to states but also to other overtly and covertly coercive social organisations (including terrorist networks, private corporations, social movements). This is best illustrated by the fact that despite the enormous military presence of US, UK and 47 other highly developed militaries in one of the poorest and infrastructurally least developed countries in the world the Taliban insurgency is well able to wage successful guerrilla war for more than 20 years. On the surface this looks as if the most powerful state in the world cannot easily overpower one of the weakest polities in the world. However the point is that US and its allies are not fighting the Afghan state which is infrastructurally and organisationally extremely weak but are engaged in a fierce struggle with the highly organised, effective, hierarchical and coercive insurgency

network – the Taliban. In this sense the Taliban is similar to other insurgency movements such as Hamas, Hezbollah or FARC: all of them have substantially increased their coercive organisational powers at the expense of the nation-state they inhabit (Malešević 2017; 2013a).

Hence paradoxically even though the continuous expansion of organisational power was decisive for the escalation of 20th century total wars it is this very same process that plays a major role in containing the inter-state warfare today. Simply put the inter-state wars have become rare and less deadly precisely because the organisational power of many contemporary states, and most of all USA, has so substantially increased to the point that initiating an inter-state war is extremely difficult, hugely expensive and, with the exception of a couple of powerful states, likely to generate enormous devastation if not complete self-destruction.

None of this is to suggest that the cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion will ultimately lead towards the end of war. On the contrary as geo-political and environmental configurations change it is likely that the long-term future will bring about more violent conflicts between the social organisations with increasingly uneven power structures. Once *Pax Americana* weakens and other states and non-state associations and networks gain even more organisational capacity one is likely to see an enormous geo-political world-wide transformation. Moreover as climate change and other environmental variations intensify including global warming, continuous population expansion and the excessive consumption of non-renewable resources, the nature of the war-state-society nexus is likely to become even more prominent. As much of the available forecasting demonstrates, climatic changes are bound to further increase CO2 emissions which ultimately will bring about a less hospitable planet – severe water shortages for large parts of the world, dramatically rising tides of oceans and seas with periodic tsunamis, the gradual disappearance of fossil fuels, the scarcity of minerals, and the lack of arable land (Mann 2012). These major changes are likely not only to make the global ecosystem unsustainable but might also cause an organisational collapse and potential disintegration of state structures in some regions of the world. Once these states prove unable to feed and protect their citizens this is likely to spark large scale migrations of people moving from the uninhabitable to the habitable parts of the globe. Such unprecedented population movement might trigger violent responses. Thus the future geo-political and environmental transformations could bring about a very different world with some states continuing to increase their organisational powers and channelling those powers in the direction of building large militaries and police forces whereas others would struggle to survive in the remnants of failed states. Thus one is likely to see a much more dystopian world of the future. On the one side the expanded cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion is likely to be used to engage in new wars of conquest for scarce resources while simultaneously creating and keeping fortress-like borders to exclude potential refugees. On the other side one might expect the appearance of organisational wastelands populated by stateless groups and organisations fighting for the survival. Although this almost apocalyptic imagery might sound unrealistic and farfetched its small-scale incarnation is already borne out in the social reality of several contemporary civil wars. From Somalia and DR Congo to Syria, Chad, Sudan and Yemen one can encounter large areas of destroyed and environmentally desolate areas where people struggle to endure or escape the never-ending war induced shortage of water and energy, the periodic famines, untreated contagious disease, chronic homelessness and unemployment (Hironaka 2005). In contrast to these zones of despondency the ever-increasing organisational capacity of most powerful states creates conditions for the real and substantial transformation of warfare in the future: the gradual displacement of human military and work force with their robotic counterparts. The mass reliance on the use of unmanned drones in Afghanistan and Yemen navigated by 'civil servants' in Nevada is probably a reliable indicator of how some wars will be waged in the future. It is quite conceivable that human warfare might give way to armed conflicts between robotic soldiers (Coker 2013). In this context where there is no direct human presence on the battlefields but where devastation and demolition continue to escalate it will quickly become obvious how futile it is to rely on human casualty counts as the barometer of war's destructiveness.

Conclusion

The contemporary scholarship on warfare has been sharply divided over the question: Is warfare on rise or in decline? While some argue that all forms of organised violence are gradually but surely disappearing from our horizon others insist that the globalisation-induced 'new wars' bring about more destitution and destruction. In contrast to these two perspectives, I argue that rather than indicating a radical transformation the current state of warfare is rooted in the same organisational logic that shaped our world over the last twelve millennia. Instead of reflecting a profound and permanent shift in historical development and a significant change in human attitude to war the contemporary decrease of organised violence is a product of specific geo-political and organisational constellations. As these constellations are produced by the same long-term processes that historically have shaped and continue to shape the war-state-society nexus as long as they are in motion it seems unlikely that the institution of war will disappear in the future.

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