

Strategy Research Project

Total Victory Through Total War

by

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United States Army War College
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

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Total War is destruction, horror and loss at the greatest scale imaginable short of the Apocalypse. Historically, Total Wars have ended in a clearly defined victory for one side with a resolution of the issues that caused the war in the first place. Total Wars generally result in a lasting peace between the belligerents. Total War has not been practiced since the end of World War II. Aversion to Total War is attributed to the revulsion at the destruction, horror and loss that Total War entails, despite its decisiveness. The countless limited wars that have been waged since 1945 have brought about varied results, frequently with no real resolution to the conflict but merely a temporary halt in the fighting that is picked up at a later date. The destruction, horror and loss are significantly less in the short term, but drawn out for much longer with less well defined results. This paper argues that the means for waging Total War must be maintained in order to deter it and, if deterrence fails, to be able to win it.

Total Victory Through Total War

He who has conquered is not conqueror, unless the conquered one confesses it.

—Quintus Ennius¹

According to ancient Athenian general and writer Thucydides, nations go to war out of fear, to preserve their honor, or to protect their interests.² Regardless of the reason, wars result in death, destruction, and suffering on a scale replicated only rarely by the greatest cataclysms of nature. Total war is the ultimate effort of a nation or nations to protect their interests, preserve their honor or abate their fear. For any government to claim to be a protector of its nation, it must be prepared to wage total war in order to achieve total victory. Failure to prepare militarily and, perhaps just as important, philosophically for total war sets a nation on a course for defeat and decline. Although total wars are horrific by nature, the unending stream of limited wars that often precede and follow total wars are no less devastating and far less decisive.

Total War is destruction, horror and loss on the greatest scale imaginable short of the Apocalypse. Historically, total wars have ended in a clearly defined “total” victory for one side with a permanent resolution of the issues that caused the war in the first place. Total wars generally result in a lasting peace between the belligerents, although they occur much less frequently. In fact, World War II was the last total war and ended almost 70 years ago. Nations are averse to total war due to their revulsion at the destruction, horror and loss that total war entails, despite its decisiveness. Those same nations have waged countless limited wars since 1945 that have brought about varied results, frequently with no real resolution to the conflict but merely a temporary halt in the fighting that is picked up at a later date. The destruction, horror and loss of limited

wars are significantly less in the short term, but drawn out for much longer with less well defined results and rarely resulting in total victory.

As Clausewitz said in *On War*, “No one starts a war – or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so – without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.”³ What Clausewitz failed to mention was what the opponent intends to achieve by the war he finds himself in and how he intends to conduct it. If the initiator goes into a limited war, but his opponent sees it as total, the initiator must be prepared to change his intentions or his objectives. This paper will argue that responsible nations must maintain the means, both force structure and political will, for waging total war in order to deter total war and, if deterrence fails, to be able to wage total war in order to win total victory.

Nations have fought total war for thousands of years, but only during the last total war were nuclear weapons available and employed. Although the advent of the nuclear weapon has arguably made total war less likely between two nuclear armed nations, this by no means equally reduces the possibility of a conventional total war. With only a few nuclear armed nations in the world, future conflicts are significantly more likely to be conventional only affairs. It is in this context that the author will explore the concept of total war among nation-states for the remainder of this paper. Due to size limitations, this paper will not include discussions of total war using nuclear weapons, nor will it address total war involving non-state actors.

Definitions

To ensure continuity in the discussion, this paper will define total war and its antithesis, limited war. These definitions are the author's based on an amalgam of academic discussions as well as legal parameters outlined by several governing

treaties, conventions and historical precedents. This paper does not define the levels of war by their resultant destruction but by the elements of national power that are committed to the endeavor; diplomatic, informational, military and economic. For example, the Vietnam War and the various conflicts that arose surrounding that war resulted in horrific death and destruction across Southeast Asia, but historians do not see it as a total war.

According to the author, total war is a conflict between two or more entities, usually states, which encompasses total commitment of all of the elements of national power on the part of one or more of the states to achieve absolute or total victory. Nations usually wage total wars against an existential threat. Total victory is the destruction of the enemy's means to wage war and any arguments he may have for pursuing war in the future. Antiquity provides an early example of total war in the Third Punic War, while World War II is the ultimate modern example of total war; the author will examine both conflicts later in this paper.

Limited war is a conflict between two or more entities, usually states but possibly including non-state actors, that encompasses select elements of national power applied at varying degrees to achieve limited objectives. Nations fight limited wars to protect vital interests against a threat other than an existential threat. The Korean War is the classic 20th century example of a limited war. The United States (U.S.) and the United Nations (UN) were committed to maintaining the Republic of Korea's existence, a vital cold war interest to the U.S. and UN to be sure, but not so vital as to risk expanding the war beyond the Korean peninsula and risk total war with China and perhaps the Soviet Union. Although General MacArthur pushed for expanding the war to China and the

use of nuclear weapons to defeat North Korean and Chinese forces and unify Korea, the Truman administration and the United Nations maintained limited objectives in order to mitigate the risks of a global conflict.⁴

Total wars result in one side dictating terms to the other through unconditional surrender, and a peace that guarantees an end to the conflict for the foreseeable future. Limited wars result in an agreed peace, at that moment in time, although future conflicts can and often do occur at a later date over the same issues that were never resolved. Although World War I is considered a total war, the terms of peace, although viewed harshly by Germany, merely served to frame the temporary suspension of conflict until they could rebuild and re-arm to begin the fighting anew. World War I was conducted in a manner befitting of total war due to national expenditure and effort, but it did not end as such because it did not achieve total victory. In the words of German Chancellor Wilhelm Marx in 1924, "...as long as Germany was regarded as a 'criminal against humanity' there could be no hope of reconciliation between victors and vanquished."⁵

Historians measure total war by the expenditure of effort and commitment to victory, in addition to the level of violence a country is willing to commit to. However, levels of violence with regards to total war are not commensurate with atrocities. The Nazi persecution of the Jews during WW II was a total commitment to extermination, but it was not war; it was murder, slaughter and an atrocity. Committing atrocities, be they torture, genocide, mass murder, rape or other wanton acts of violence, does not commit a combatant to total war, but to criminality. In contrast, the fire bombings of Germany and Japan in WWII were horrific in the scale of their destruction, but they were not

wanton acts of devastation. As this paper will examine, they were deliberate acts of warfare against an enemy nation, with political and military objectives.

Saint Thomas Aquinas began an ongoing discussion over the justice of war in his exhaustive *Summa Theologica*.⁶ Several other authors and politicians have debated the merits and morality of war over the years with an astounding impact on a modern nation's willingness to go to war. This Just War Theory shapes most modern geopolitical discussions with few exceptions. Most recently, the Bush Doctrine applied Aquinas's arguments in his Question 40 to rationalize the pre-emptive invasion of Iraq in 2003. Question 40 explains, "... that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it ... that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil."⁷ The Bush administration argued the linkage of Iraq to terrorist organizations, to WMD, and violations of UN Security Council Resolutions.⁸ Although some historians and politicians have argued that the Iraq War was a questionable use of the Just War Theory test, it is a good example of the impact the theory has had on modern leader decision making as it pertains to warfare.

Modern Limitations on Total War

Historians, ethicists and lawyers have written countless volumes on the ethics, morals and limitations on warfare. This paper will focus on three documents that have shaped most of these discussions. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Francis Lieber's *Instructions For The Government Of Armies Of The United States In The Field*, issued by President Lincoln in April of 1863 as General Order 100 and commonly referred to as The Lieber Code, and finally the Geneva and Hague Conventions.⁹ Aquinas makes the argument for what it takes to justify going to war and how to act

honorably during war. Lieber and the Conventions focus on rules governing actions during war.

Aquinas was a Dominican friar and priest who wrote, among many other things, justifications for the participation of Christians in war and explained them in his *Summa Theologica*.¹⁰ Aquinas established the following criteria for a war to be “just.”

First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged. Secondly, a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault. Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil.¹¹

Aquinas’s theological arguments for permitting Christian participation in war have become the foundation for philosophical, political and legal arguments for nations to wage war.

Francis Lieber established a consolidated and comprehensive list of the “Laws of War” as from the Declaration of Paris dated April 16, 1856.¹² The Declaration of Paris was short and incomplete. By contrast, the Lieber Code laid out ten sections and 157 articles ranging from “Section I - Martial Law - Military jurisdiction - Military necessity – Retaliation,” to “Section X - Insurrection - Civil War – Rebellion.”¹³

The Geneva and Hague Conventions evolved over several decades as a by-product of the Lieber Code and as major countries recognized the need for rules and even limitations on warfare (Fig. 1). The advent of Industrial Age warfare, foreshadowed in the American Civil War, reinforced efforts to manage the scope of the violence. After the bloodletting and carnage of World War I, the major powers updated and revised the conventions. The final and current versions produced after the horrors

of World War II confirmed the need for an attempt to curtail the extent of violence that nations could inflict on one another.

Hague Conference of 1899

Correspondence, Instructions and Reports of the United States Commission

Hague I - Pacific Settlement of International Disputes : 29 July 1899

Hague II - Laws and Customs of War on Land : 29 July 1899

Hague III - Adaptation to Maritime Warfare of Principles of Geneva Convention of 1864 : July 29, 1899

Hague IV - Prohibiting Launching of Projectiles and Explosives from Balloons : July 29, 1899

Declaration I - on the Launching of Projectiles and Explosives from Balloons; July 29, 1899

Declaration II - on the Use of Projectiles the Object of Which is the Diffusion of Asphyxiating or Deleterious Gases; July 29, 1899

Declaration III - on the Use of Bullets Which Expand or Flatten Easily in the Human Body; July 29, 1899

Final Act of the International Peace Conference; July 29, 1899

Hague Conference of 1907

Hague I - Pacific Settlement of International Disputes : 18 October 1907

Hague II - Limitation of Employment of Force for Recovery of Contract Debts : October 18, 1907

Hague III - Opening of Hostilities : 18 October 1907

Hague IV - Laws and Customs of War on Land : 18 October 1907

Hague V - Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land : 18 October 1907

Hague VI - Status of Enemy Merchant Ships at the Outbreak of Hostilities : 18 October 1907

Hague VII - Conversion of Merchant Ships into War Ships : 18 October 1907

Hague VIII - Laying of Automatic Submarine Contact Mines : 18 October 1907

Hague IX - Bombardment by Naval Forces in Time of War : 18 October 1907

Hague X - Adaptation to Maritime War of the Principles of the Geneva Convention : 18 October 1907

Hague XI - Restrictions With Regard to the Exercise of the Right of Capture in Naval War : 18 October 1907

Hague XIII - Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War : 18 October 1907
Geneva Conventions

1864 - Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded on the Field of Battle; August 22

1928 - Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating Gas, and for Bacteriological Methods of Warfare; February 8

1929 - Convention Between the United States of America and Other Powers, Relating to Prisoners of War; July 27

1949 - Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, August 12

1949 - Convention (II) for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea, August 12
1949 - Convention (III) Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War; August 12
1949 - Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, August 12
1975 - Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (1972); March 26

Figure 1¹⁴

Public opinion is an extremely powerful political tool in modern liberal democracies. Most modern democracies will not willingly march into a war without significant public debate. This debate usually revolves around Just War Theory, but the actual merits or interests of the nation in going to war often overshadow the theory. Since modern democracies frequently have conscript armies, public opinion is critical in ensuring popular support, and plenty of conscripts, for the war. In the case of a modern democracy with a professional military, like the United States or the United Kingdom, the initial debates of late have not been as heated, but the need for popular support is no less important, especially if a conflict becomes drawn out or casualties are significantly higher than expected. Since the citizens of democracies pay taxes to fund military expenditures, support for that expenditure is critical. Without popular support, the democratic government that marches off to war will likely not remain in power for long.

The industrial age significantly increased the ability of man to slaughter his fellow man on the battlefield. In addition to Aquinas's arguments for justifying a war and the conduct of the war, as well as the formalized conventions governing war, modern societies have become much more sensitive to the need to kill humans in order to settle disputes. The question has evolved to not only "can I" engage in war justly, but "should

l?” Even situations that could justify war using Just War Theory do not mean that war is the only solution. Although war can settle disputes and historically has often been the means of choice for resolving issues, the recent trend has been for this option to become less palatable. Since the horrific destruction of World War II, the world has become more prone to seeking peaceful solutions to difficult problems in order to avoid the death and destruction that go hand and hand with war, especially total war.

Historical Examples

History provides several examples of total war, its immediate and long term effects, as well as its costs. This paper will examine three wars that provide arguments for the effectiveness and decisiveness of total war; the quintessential total war of antiquity, the Third Punic War; the American Civil War, arguably the first large scale “modern war;” and the largest war in human history, World War II. All three wars were epic in their relative scale of death, destruction, and the level of commitment to victory exhibited by the combatants. Additionally, all of these wars demonstrate this paper’s argument that total war, waged in pursuit of total victory, results in a decisive and long term resolution of the issues that caused the conflict in the first place.

The Punic Wars – Defining “Carthaginian Peace”

The Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage ended in a campaign of total war that settled any disputes over Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean. Rome and Carthage were fighting for Mediterranean hegemony, trade interests, and eventually in Rome’s eyes for their own existence. Rome and Carthage had fought twice, the first war (264-241 BC) primarily at sea, in Sicily and in Africa.¹⁵ The second war (218-201 BC), “was clearly a legacy of the first,”¹⁶ was waged on the Italian peninsula for twelve

years and reached the very gates of Rome. The third and final episode (149-146 BC) ended poorly for the Carthaginians. Rome's resilience was impressive.

While Carthage and Rome fought the first two wars largely over economic and political interests, as well as tainted honor,¹⁷ the third war was clearly a result of Roman fear of a resurgent Carthage. Adrian Goldsworthy explains the Roman attitude towards defeated enemies,

The traditions of Punic warfare did not expect a defeated state, especially one which had not been conquered and absorbed, to remain forever subject to the victor. Only the Romans thought in this way. No longer were the Carthaginians unambiguously dependent allies of Rome. That a former enemy, and one who had pushed Rome to the brink of utter defeat, was once again strong and independent immediately turned her back into a threat. This was the root of the Romans' rising fear of Carthage.¹⁸

The Roman Republic feared Carthage and used whatever means at its disposal to take the war to the Carthaginian heartland and eventually to Carthage proper in order to settle the dispute once and for all. Carthage had shrunk in size and power as a result of the second war but still held on against the Romans for three years. Rome raised one of the largest armies it had ever fielded to date for the campaign to take the war to Carthage and insure it would not be a threat again.¹⁹

The Third Punic War ended in 146 B.C. with the complete destruction of Carthage. Although the myth of Romans plowing and sowing salt into the land are a bit of an exaggeration, Scipio, the Roman general who conquered Carthage, did raze the city and destroy Carthage as a political entity.²⁰ The Romans slaughtered or sold into slavery every Carthaginian citizen.²¹ Total war achieved total victory. The Third Punic War created the term "Carthaginian Peace," a term that has grown to mean the unconditional surrender and absolute destruction of the vanquished.

The American Civil War – The Birth of Modern Total War

The American Civil War had many causes, but the critical element that drove secession and the resultant fighting was Southern fear of Northern domination in the U.S. political system and the threat that domination meant to the existence of slavery. Slavery was a “vital national interest” to the economic existence of the South and the South would fight Northern domination, “...using States Rights for a spear and the Constitution for a shield.”²² Southern fears of the loss of slavery drove the country to war, but the Southern defense of States’ Rights hamstrung her ability to wage total war and contributed to her demise.

The American Civil War did not start out as a total war. Both sides expected quick tactical wins that would achieve strategic victory and both sides were sorely disappointed. Both sides mobilized all elements of national power once the belligerents realized the scope of the struggle, but the North made a more comprehensive mobilization and demonstrated a commitment to total victory that the South could not match politically, militarily or economically. The North moved towards total war more quickly than the South, more systematically and more effectively, using diplomatic, informational, military and economic means that eventually dwarfed the rebellious South. No war in the Western Hemisphere since has matched the scale of the Civil War.

Diplomatically, the Confederacy was isolated from potential European allies, primarily because of the slavery issue. Mr. W.L. Yancey, Confederate envoy to Great Britain in 1861, reported back to the Confederate President Davis, “The sentiment of Europe is anti-slavery, and that portion of public opinion which forms, and is represented by, the government of Great Britain, is abolition.”²³ Although European

recognition of the South was desirable and could have been decisive, the Confederacy had made their argument around slavery and would not budge on the issue. The South failed to acknowledge the challenge slavery presented to achieving total victory and as a result cut off the most likely sources of assistance.

The South was the first side to enact compulsory service in April of 1862 to feed the ranks of a frequently outnumbered army, "...the first national conscription law in American history" but it did so under great duress.²⁴ The effort to put armies in the field became a point of extreme debate and discord in the Confederate Congress with comparisons of Davis to Napoleon and preferences of Lincoln as a dictator instead of President Davis.²⁵ However distasteful, the military exigencies of the situation demanded conscription, as did the political needs of Southern constituents.

Their states' rights sentiments notwithstanding, the Southern people had grown accustomed to a government with greater resources than any individual state possessed and which would bear the main burden of military defense; they would not accept less military protection from the new government at Richmond than they had received from the old government at Washington.²⁶

Commitment to total victory required mobilization of all available manpower, regardless of philosophical concerns. While the survival of the Confederacy stood in the balance, Confederate leaders questioned the means to maintain their nation's existence. This political infighting exposes the critical failure of Confederate leaders to acknowledge the costs - philosophical, political, and economic - of waging a total war.

The Confederacy lagged significantly in the move to total war on the international front and, once committed, failed miserably. Diplomatically, the South deluded itself in thinking it could compel the Europeans to actively fight for their cause and Mr. W.L. Yancy's report to President Davis shows the utter failings in this regard.²⁷ The

European powers could not countenance slavery under any circumstances. The English were the last major European power to outlaw slavery in 1833.²⁸

Economically, the South overestimated the significance of their primary cash crop, cotton, the production of which was only possible through slavery. Cotton was a global market and the loss of Southern supplies as a result of the Union blockade had little effect. Increased production in Egypt and India as well as stores on hand in Europe quickly offset the loss of Southern cotton production.²⁹ As a result, the South lost its primary source of income and was unable to replace cotton with another marketable crop or any substantial industry that could drive the Southern economy. Worse yet, the poor infrastructure in the South was difficult to expand, which prevented the efficient movement of goods grown and produced in the South to sustain the Armies and population.³⁰ The South failed to prepare itself for the demands of total war economically and could not compensate militarily, despite increases and adjustments in force structure, or make the needed critical infrastructure changes quickly enough to keep up with the North.

Operationally, the Fabian tactics of Robert E. Lee failed the total war test. Lee's failed invasions of Maryland and Pennsylvania attempted to take the war to the North, but they were too short lived and too limited in effects on the North, beyond the casualties inflicted at Antietam and Gettysburg, to be decisive. "The invasion of Maryland and possibly Pennsylvania would, to be sure, be more of a raid than a sustained offensive."³¹ Lee's failures at Antietam and Gettysburg cemented his belief that invading the North was not the road to victory, "We are not in a condition, and never have been, in my opinion, to invade the enemy's country with a prospect of permanent

benefit.”³² While Clausewitz himself recognized that the defense was the stronger form of warfare,³³ he also acknowledged “...that the real fruits of victory are won only in pursuit. By its very nature, pursuit tends to be a more integral part of the action in an offensive battle than in a defensive one.”³⁴ The South’s defensive strategy made it difficult for them to achieve total victory with the time and resources they had available.

General Sherman’s campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas, by comparison, exemplified total war in its element. Sherman recognized the need to tie down armies while Grant launched his campaign in the east against Richmond, destroyed industrial and agricultural capacity in Georgia, an area not yet ravaged by the war, and exacted a high moral price on the citizens of the rebellious states.³⁵ Sherman believed that the citizens of the states, South Carolina in particular, had brought on the war and for it to be ended they must understand the costs of rebellion. In contrast to Lee’s efforts to not arouse the Northern populations too severely, Sherman sought to “make Georgia howl.” Although he did not bring a “Carthaginian Peace” to the South, he brought the next closest thing.

I attach more importance to these deep incisions into the enemy’s country, because this war differs from European wars in this particular: we are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war, as well as their organized armies. I know that this recent movement of mine through Georgia has had a wonderful effect in this respect. Thousands who had been deceived by their lying newspapers to believe that we were being whipped all the time now realize the truth, and have no appetite for a repetition of the same experience. To be sure, Jeff Davis has his people under pretty good discipline, but I think faith in him is much shaken in Georgia, and before we have done with her South Carolina will not be quite so tempestuous.³⁶

Sherman exemplified the North’s commitment to total war and total victory. Union armies meticulously divided and conquered the South and maintained an occupation

force at strategic locations. The post war reconstruction period maintained an occupation force that some could argue is still present in the South today where the preponderance of U.S. Army installations are resident.

President Lincoln embodied the North's commitment to total war and victory. Lincoln set the tone for the pending struggle in his "House Divided Speech" on June 16, 1858 in Springfield, Illinois:

We are now far into the *fifth* year, since a policy was initiated, with the *avowed* object, and *confident* promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, *not ceased*, but has *constantly augmented*. In *my* opinion, it *will* not cease, until a *crisis* shall have been reached, and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*. I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved* -- I do not expect the house to *fall* -- but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided. It will become *all* one thing or *all* the other.³⁷

Even before he became president, Lincoln defined the significance of the struggle and laid the groundwork for the commitment of the North to total victory. The South was no less committed to ensuring the continued existence of slavery, even if it meant secession, but lacked the commitment to total war that would be required for victory. For Lincoln, it was not in the interests of the Union to be divided and eventually only total war would prove him right. Southern leaders shared similar rhetoric towards secession, but failed to back it up with a commitment to the sacrifices that would enable total victory.

Total war for the Union meant an invasion and subjugation of the rebellious South. Lincoln was committed to that end. The Confederacy, by contrast, insisted that it could not fight a war of aggression and that it was the victim of aggression, "...the Southern idea that the contest was a defense of a courtly, chivalric society."³⁸ In stark contrast to the Union, the Confederacy fought a predominately defensive war. Southern

invasions were few, unsuccessful, and never intended to subject the North to Southern intentions, but merely to establish terms to negotiate a settled peace. The South was not committed to total war and suffered because of it.

Once the Civil War began, Lincoln demonstrated his commitment to total war through a comprehensive campaign of encirclement, blockade, invasion and subjugation. Lincoln's Gettysburg address further emphasized the significance of the struggle and the dedication of the Union to victory,

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.³⁹

Lincoln saw the Civil War as an existential struggle for the United States. He resolved to bear any cost to achieve victory.

While the struggle was no less significant for the South, Confederate leaders failed to commit themselves to the cause with such fervor and with such dedication, dedication that would have required the ending of slavery. The South claimed the war was over States' Rights, not slavery. Slavery stood in the way of total mobilization for the South and prevented foreign support. The South attempted to wage a total war without total commitment.

Losses in the Civil War reflected the effort. Northern casualties numbered 640,000 or 2.7% of the population, with 365,000 of those casualties dead, 1.5% of the population.⁴⁰ Southern casualties numbered 450,000 or 8.1% of the white population, with 256,000 of those dead, 4.7% of the population.⁴¹ The lasting impact on a society of

the loss of 27% of the military aged male population cannot be underestimated.⁴² The North not only killed its way to victory, it settled a 90 year debate over slavery and altered Southern culture in the course of five years of fighting. The North's commitment to total war achieved total victory. The South was defeated in the field and occupied as a conquered nation, never to rise again.

World War I – Total War without Total Victory

Historians still argue over the causes of World War I and who is to blame. Historians often cite Germany's fear of the Triple Entente and the Schlieffen Plan's design to quickly knock France out the war as contributing factors as well as the vital interests of Britain, France, Austria-Hungary and Russia. "The defence of these vital interests was incompatible with peace between the great powers."⁴³ The Treaty of Versailles used this argument to lay blame completely on the Germans.⁴⁴ Regardless of the cause, World War I saw a similar transition as the American Civil War from expectations of quick and decisive victory to begrudging acceptance of the need to mobilize for total war. The inconclusive results of the early campaigns of 1914 forced the belligerents to commit to war on a scale previously unimaginable, despite the foreshadowing's of the American Civil War and the Russo-Japanese War in Manchuria.

The failure of the European powers to prepare for total war is what set them up for the carnage and inconclusiveness of World War I. Previous European wars since the age of Napoleon were short, violent and decisive. Quick decisive battles marked the Napoleonic Wars followed by months of no fighting. Europe was not prepared militarily or philosophically for the rigors of total war. Failure to prepare philosophically on both sides created the conditions of indecisiveness, delayed the fighting, and

allowed all of the belligerents the time to mobilize for total war. Once that mobilization was complete, the opponents literally bludgeoned themselves to death.

The trenches dispelled the fallacy of a quick and decisive solution in World War I and the nations embroiled committed themselves to total war tactically and operationally, but only begrudgingly embraced it at the strategic level. Germany made the first and most significant move by resuming unrestricted submarine warfare in January of 1917, after a short suspension due to the United States' and other countries' objections.⁴⁵ This move was unprecedented in warfare but completely in line with total war. Nations eventually attempted strategic aerial bombing but technological shortcomings limited the effectiveness. The battlefield became a stalemate but the human costs of attrition and the naval blockade eventually drove Germany to the peace table. This is where the failure of a strategic commitment to total war laid the groundwork for World War II.

Germany was defeated through attrition and exhaustion, but unlike Carthage or the Confederacy, was neither razed nor completely occupied. At Versailles the Allies sought to punish Germany, destroy her ability to wage war and establish the conditions for a lasting peace in Europe. The allies had waged total war and forced Germany to the peace table, but squandered the extremely costly battlefield victory by failing to achieve total victory. As harsh as the Treaty of Versailles was, the Germans maintained, and would revive, the will to resist and eventually confronted the Allies again. The chimera of a lasting peace in Europe was lost because the Allies were too exhausted and not philosophically or politically committed to occupying Germany and achieving total victory. The Allies saw the German Army, Navy and the Kaiser as the

causes of war and discounted the role of the German people. Although the Germans were defeated and despondent, the Allies did not subjugate the German people like Sherman cowed the citizens of the Confederacy. By neglecting this critical element of total war and total victory, destruction of the means and arguments for war, the Allies set the stage for a second and even more horrific World War that would take total war to its ultimate expression.

What World War I did provide is an excellent example of human killing power and the effects that can have on a country, namely France and Great Britain. Like the American Civil War, a 4% casualty rate for dead had a lasting impact. France lost 1.3 million dead (4% of the population) and 4.2 million wounded (another 10% of the population) of the 8 million men mobilized, for a staggering 73% overall casualty rate.⁴⁶ Great Britain lost 900,000 dead (2% of the population) and 2 million wounded (another 3% of the population) in the war.⁴⁷ For Great Britain these losses would shape foreign policy leading to World War II and the conduct of that war as well. The French national casualty rate from World War One was in excess of 14% representing a Pyrrhic victory on an epic scale.⁴⁸ Germany, the great losers in the war, suffered similar devastating losses in numbers, but a significantly lower national casualty rate of 10.5% with 2.6% dead, by comparison.⁴⁹ For France it was a psychological shock that would lead to surrender in May of 1941 and the end of an empire.

Similar to the Confederacy in the American Civil War, four percent of the French national population killed appears to be a breaking point. In the case of the Confederacy, that amount of losses was unsustainable and with no Allies forced the issue. France suffered a similar percentage, and nearly broke in the process,

buttressed in World War I by Great Britain and eventually America. World War II witnessed the longer term effects on France where she surrendered within six weeks of the German invasion, despite a larger and better equipped army. France's will was broken in World War I but France didn't realize it until 1940. The Germans lost the war, but not the will to continue the fight because despite winning, the Allies had not achieved what this paper defines as total victory.

World War II – The Zenith of Total War

World War II serves as the defining example in modern times of a total war that achieved total victory. Historians view the aggressive acts of Germany and Japan to acquire land and resources in pursuit of their national interests as the primary causes of the war. As a result of their aggressive pursuits, by the end of World War II those two nations ceased to exist in any reflection of their prewar image. Germany and Japan surrendered unconditionally and the victors occupied them completely; total war achieved total victory. Both nations have since renounced aggressive war, and Japan initially renounced war of any kind and forbade a standing military. World War II was total and decisive, but it was the failure of total victory in World War I and a failure to prepare for total war after World War I that set the conditions for World War II to occur.

The Allies defeated Germany by a concerted effort of strategic bombing to destroy its ability to wage war and a land invasion of the European continent to destroy the German army and physically occupy the country. General Eisenhower's orders were, "The ultimate mission of the Commanding General, ETOUSA, is the total defeat of Germany."⁵⁰ The Big Three - Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin - were committed to Germany's "unconditional surrender."⁵¹ The Allies were committed to total victory; there would be no inconclusive Treaty of Versailles.

The strategic bombing campaign, based on the writings of Guilo Douhet and other airpower theorists of the 20's and 30's, was initially thought to be a decisive means of quickly ending the war. Like so many other "silver bullets," strategic bombing did not end the war on its own, nor did it "shatter enemy civilian morale, leaving the enemy government no option but to sue for peace."⁵² The Strategic Bombing Survey (European War) conducted by the United States Army Air Forces in September of 1945, concluded that it *was* in fact decisive but could have been more effective if employed differently.

Allied air power was decisive in the war in Western Europe. Hindsight inevitably suggests that it might have been employed differently or better in some respects. Nevertheless, it was decisive. In the air, its victory was complete. At sea, its contribution, combined with naval power, brought an end to the enemy's greatest naval threat -- the U-boat; on land, it helped turn the tide overwhelmingly in favor of Allied ground forces. Its power and superiority made possible the success of the invasion. It brought the economy which sustained the enemy's armed forces to virtual collapse, although the full effects of this collapse had not reached the enemy's front lines when they were overrun by Allied forces. It brought home to the German people the full impact of modern war with all its horror and suffering. *Its imprint on the German nation will be lasting.*⁵³(Authors emphasis)

The last sentence is extremely prescient, "Its imprint on the German nation will be lasting." Total victory, aided by strategic bombing and the occupation of the "Fatherland," set the conditions for a lasting European peace. Total victory destroyed the threat of future German aggression. The Allies unequivocally crushed Germany's ability and will to wage aggressive war. Sixty-eight years later Germany is still debating the merits and willingness to send military forces abroad.⁵⁴

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific War) found similar results from the strategic bombing of Japan.

We underestimated the ability of our air attack on Japan's home islands, coupled as it was with blockade and previous military defeats, to achieve unconditional surrender without invasion. By July 1945, the weight of our air attack had as yet reached only a fraction of its planned proportion, Japan's industrial potential had been fatally reduced, her civilian population had lost its confidence in victory and was approaching the limit of its endurance, and her leaders, convinced of the inevitability of defeat, were preparing to accept surrender. The only remaining problem was the timing and terms of that surrender.⁵⁵

Although it lacks the European survey's note on a lasting "imprint" on the Japanese nation, the comment is appropriate, especially in light of the impact of the two Atomic bombs on the Japanese psyche.

The European Bombing Survey's comment on the lasting imprint of Strategic bombing on the German nation is arguably the strongest argument for strategic bombing and total war ever made. Total victory, and the subsequent occupation, transformed Germany from a belligerent, aggressive and murderous nation to one of the most pacifistic nations on the planet. Japan followed the same path.

Total war in World War II was completely successful in achieving its aims and this paper's definition of total victory. Germany and Japan were defeated in the field, their nations occupied, their forms of government and society re-structured, and their capability and willingness to go to war for other than self-defense completely erased.

Limited War

Both sides in a conflict may see the level of warfare from a different perspective. The United States involvement in Vietnam is a good example of one side fighting a limited war while the other fought a total war. A North Vietnamese victory never threatened the U.S. existence as a nation while increased American commitment to the conflict did threaten U.S. interests in other regions and political order at home.⁵⁶ North Vietnam however saw unification with South Vietnam as a national priority and was

committed to victory at any cost, culminating in an invasion of the South. The United States never threatened an invasion of the North or the use of nuclear weapons. The U.S. exercised all elements of national power in this conflict, with the military playing the dominant role; however that role was limited since the objectives were limited.

The most significant difference between limited and total war is the level of commitment of the combatants to achieve *total victory*. Here is where the significance of total victory is critical. The author defines total victory as “the destruction of the enemy’s means to wage war and any arguments he may have for pursuing war in the future.” Limited war by its definition has limited objectives, based on a nation’s interests, which may or may not prevent more wars in the future. With limited objectives come limited ends, and very likely open ended disputes. Total victory ends the disputes, period.

Using Vietnam as an example again, the South Vietnamese and Americans achieved their limited aims of securing South Vietnam from Northern aggression and subversion in the Paris Peace Treaty of 1973.⁵⁷ The peace lasted two years. The Northern invasion of South Vietnam, destruction of her armies in the field, occupation of the country and subjugation of the population achieved total victory for the North. That peace has lasted for the last 38 years and will likely last well into the future.

In the process of losing the Vietnam War, the U.S. incurred over 58,000 killed⁵⁸ and 303,704 wounded.⁵⁹ Vietnamese losses were a staggering 2-3 million killed, civilian and military, from 1954-1975, the period of U.S. involvement.⁶⁰ The limited war fought in Vietnam incurred a small national U.S. casualty rate of 0.1%⁶¹ but a national casualty rate of 6% for the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese casualty rate is in line with Great

Britain's and France's combined national casualty rates of World War I. Under the guise of fighting a limited war for limited objectives, the United States inflicted total war levels of casualties on Vietnam without achieving the limited goals that had led it to war in the first place. These staggering casualty rates were a significant contributor to the loss of United States prestige and influence during and after the Vietnam War and took a generation to overcome.

Clausewitz warned of limited wars in chapter seven of *On War*. "The net result of having such a limited objective is that everything tends to cancel out...That is how events tend to develop, dragging the commander down, frustrating him more and more."⁶² Tactical and strategic frustration prevented the United States from recognizing that the nature of the limited war they were fighting was a total war for the Vietnamese.

These horrendous casualty figures and the geo-political consequences beg the question of whether or not the U.S. should have gone in to Vietnam with a total war approach up front and possibly incurred fewer casualties on both sides with greater positive results, or better yet, not gotten involved in the first place. This paper argues that a nation should calculate a cost-benefit analysis of total war before going into any war, even one perceived as limited. These calculations will help national leaders in their decision-making prior to going to war, and ideally should assist in the analysis of the situation if the nature of the war shifts or if the nation determines its interests are no longer worth the costs.

Effectiveness of Total War

The threat of total war is the deterrent that enables nations to wage limited wars. Korea, Vietnam, and countless other limited wars were limited purely out of the fear of total war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Memories of World War II

were fresh during the early years of the Cold War and the ability and will of both super powers to wage total war was unquestionable. “Massive Retaliation” and “Mutual Assured Destruction” were national policies that communicated American resolve to wage total war against the Soviets if the need arose.⁶³

The physical costs of total nuclear war are total destruction of the world as we know it. During the Cold War both superpowers recognized this and thankfully avoided the specter. The physical costs of total war, short of a nuclear exchange, are far less devastating than a nuclear war, but as World War II demonstrated, it is not much less horrific.

In the case of Europe after World War II, the entire continent was devastated. Even those areas that had not suffered directly from the physical impacts of actual combat suffered.⁶⁴ The United States developed the Marshall Plan to assist Europe in rebuilding its entire infrastructure and economy. German occupation during the war and fighting on the continent had displaced populations, altered production efforts and priorities and in some cases completely uprooted production facilities and moved them. In the words of Assistant Secretary of State Will Clayton in May of 1947, “Europe is steadily deteriorating. The political position reflects the economic ... Millions of people in cities are slowly starving.”⁶⁵ Beyond the losses in blood and devastation from battles and strategic bombing, total war had completely uprooted Europe’s way of life.

Politically, World War II completely destroyed the political structures of every nation in Europe with the exception of Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Although its political structure was still intact, Great Britain did begin to lose its empire as a result of the war. In the Pacific, every country involved in the war except Australia went through

some sort of political turmoil following the war. In the case of England, the Conservative party was in power at the beginning of the war, and under Winston Churchill's leadership the party fought and won the war. Once Germany surrendered, the Labor party came to power.⁶⁶ Even in victory the political costs were high.

The political impacts on the English and French empires were slow to gain momentum, but comprehensive in their effects nonetheless. Great Britain was bankrupt and starving after World War II and quickly began de-constructing its global empire. In February of 1947, Great Britain notified the United States that it could no longer afford its support to Greece and Turkey.

...because of the serious economic situation in Great Britain, his country could no longer support the Greek and Turkish governments with economic and military aid...Without help, Greek and Turkish independence would not last and all the Middle East would come under Russian control. The British asked whether the United States would be willing to assume the bulk of these burdens.⁶⁷

Victory had been so expensive it literally cost Great Britain its empire and status as a world power.

France suffered a similar fate, although it took longer to sort itself out. Indo-China, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam all gained their independence from France within ten years of the end of World War II. Algeria took another decade to secure its independence, but the impact was even more significant to metropolitan France than the loss of Indo-China. Algeria was a province of France and literally considered French soil. World War II had rendered France so physically and politically weak that it could no longer afford to manage a colony less than 500 miles across the Mediterranean.⁶⁸ Anti-colonialism and French excesses led to a horrific seven year war.

The French fought for limited goals, maintaining Algeria as a province. The Algerians fought a total war to achieve total victory and independence. Total war won the day.

Despite the impact on the political systems of most participants in World War II, the good news was the destruction of aggressive fascism and totalitarianism as legitimate forms of government. The Soviet Union survived, at least for another forty-four years, but the ideas of fascism and totalitarianism lost any shred of legitimacy in the Western world.

Total war can dramatically alter a nation's and even the world's moral compass. The Civil War completely discredited Southern political arguments in support of slavery. Germany and Japan re-wrote their national constitutions and declared war unacceptable. Germany's constitution reads, "Article 26 (Ban on preparing a war of aggression) (1) Activities tending and undertaken with the intent to disturb peaceful relations between nations, especially to prepare for aggressive war, are unconstitutional. They shall be made a punishable offense."⁶⁹ Japan declared war unacceptable and forbade itself from ever participating in war,

CHAPTER II: RENUNCIATION OF WAR. Article 9: Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. 2) In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.⁷⁰

Japan has since amended its constitution to allow for defensive military capabilities, but the significance of the Japanese renunciation of war still resonates.

Conclusion

Total victory requires the commitment of a nation to the conduct of total war - philosophically, politically, economically and militarily. A nation can achieve total victory

by means short of total war, but that nation must understand the potential requirements before it ventures into any war, even one it perceives as limited. Once a war begins, the interests that drove a nation to war may change and the need to move to total war may materialize overnight.

For the United States to maintain its credibility as a world power, it must maintain the capability and will to wage total war. Without that capability and demonstrated will, limited wars can grow to total wars on the enemy's terms. This is not to argue that the United States should recklessly engage in devastating wars to prove its resolve. The lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the more recent Gulf Wars, are still resonant in the international community. However, the United States must have the capabilities to wage total war and message to the world that it will conduct war on those terms if it deems it necessary. Possible adversaries such as North Korea, Iran, Syria and possibly even China must not feel emboldened by diminished U.S. capability or resolve.

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