



Armed Conflict, Part 2: Methods and Aftermaths

Chapter Summary

This follow-up chapter on armed conflict focuses on the tools and strategies of war, followed by its aftermath and the different paths forward. First, a number of basic military concepts are defined and explained, followed by types of weapons. Four **emerging military technologies (EMTs)** are highlighted: cyberwarfare, non-lethal weapons, soldier enhancements, and unmanned systems. The important distinction between **strategy** and **tactics** in military affairs is also considered.

In terms of actually fighting a war, there is a difference between the realist (**total war**) and the idealist (“*jus in bello*”) perspectives. Wars today are generally regulated by laws of armed conflict (adhering to idealism), which entail a number of key principles. First and most importantly, there is the idea of **discrimination** and **non-combatant immunity**, which distinguishes between **legitimate** and **illegitimate targets** in warfare. Related topics like **collateral damage**, **due care**, and **dual-use targets** are also examined. Two case studies provide real examples of these principles in action: the My Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War and the issue of child soldiers. Next, **proportionality** in war and the subject of prohibited weapons are discussed, including **weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)**. Finally, the principles of **means mala in se** and **reprisals** are explored.

After a war, there is surprisingly little international law that regulates the behaviour of the victors. Generally, one of two approaches tends to be taken: retribution or rehabilitation. According to the **retribution model**, the “good” side won and the “bad” side lost; this means the post-war settlement revolves around punishing the bad side. The basic features of this approach include a public peace treaty; exchange of prisoners-of-war (POWs); apology from the aggressor; war crimes trials for those responsible; aggressor must give up any gains; aggressor must be demilitarized; and aggressor must suffer further losses. The **Treaty of Versailles** after World War I and the results of the First Persian Gulf War in 1991 are case studies to illustrate the retribution model in practice.

The **rehabilitation model** actually shares many similarities with the retribution model, but there are three notable differences: no sanctions, no compensation payments, and it favours forcing regime change (to create a new, non-aggressive member of the international community). Based on the case study of Germany and Japan’s reconstruction after World War II (instances of best practice since these two countries successfully re-integrated into the international community), 10 principles were developed for the rehabilitation model. However, when the model is applied to contemporary cases like reconstruction after the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the results are much more mixed (with significant challenges continuing to plague these two countries).

Key Concepts

Air force: composed of pilots and their gunners or bombers, and the different kinds of planes and helicopters they fly. Its basic function is to control and secure a given airspace. (p. 261)

Anti-personnel mines: a type of land mine that is laid on or just below the surface of the ground; these armaments are cheap, destructive, and very effective. (p. 277)

Army: a ground-based force, composed of soldiers and the officers who command them. An army's most basic function is to secure and hold a given piece of territory. (p. 261)

Asymmetrical warfare: warfare pitting a state government on one side against a non-state actor (like a terrorist or insurgent group) on the other. (p. 267)

Biological weapons: release a living organism, usually a virus or bacteria, capable of harming or killing those exposed to it. These are widely dreaded for their unpredictable side effects, and are outlawed by treaty. (p. 276)

Chemical weapons: unleash a gas, or some other chemical, that kills or harms those exposed to it. Mustard gas during World War I is an example of a chemical weapon used in warfare. These are outlawed by treaty. (p. 276)

Collateral damage: civilian casualties during war, who are the accidental, unintended victims of fighting. (p. 271)

Cyberwarfare: trying to control and defend cyberspace in accordance with that country's interests. (p. 261)

Demilitarization: when the tools of the aggressor to commit aggression are taken away. Essentially, the defeated aggressor loses many of its military assets and weapons capabilities, and has caps or limits placed on its ability to rebuild its armed forces over time. (p. 281)

Denazification: a purging process that took place in West Germany after World War II; all signs, symbols, buildings, literature, and other items directly associated with the Nazis were destroyed utterly. The Nazi party itself was abolished and declared illegal. (p. 285)

Discrimination: the need for fighters to distinguish or discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate targets, and to take aim only at the former. (p. 269)

Drones: the most high profile type of unmanned systems, these are small planes that can often be flown remotely and without enemy radar detection, and that can be used either for espionage and surveillance or else for dropping bombs and shooting missiles. (p. 264)

Dual-use targets: targets, mostly pieces of infrastructure, used by the military and civilians during war. Examples include roads, bridges, radio and television networks and transmitters, railway lines, harbours, airports, and so on. International law forbids these to be targeted, but in reality, they often are, as they are vitally important to military forces. (p. 271)

Due care: principle in warfare that means serious and sustained efforts, from the top of the military chain of command down to the bottom, to protect civilian lives as much as possible under the difficult circumstances of war. (p. 271)

Genetic enhancement: an emerging area of soldier enhancements, this involves the deliberate manipulation of one's genetic code to augment capabilities permanently. (p. 264)

Guerrilla tactics: unpredictable, low-level, counter-conventional methods in war that can inflict considerable damage on even the richest and most powerful countries. (p. 267)

Illegitimate target: in general, anyone or anything not demonstrably engaged in military supply or military activity is out of bounds and should be immune from direct, intentional attack. (p. 269)

Incapacitating agents: another name for non-lethal weapons, designed to keep the body count low in war. (p. 264)

Intelligence: the gathering and analysis of data about the enemy. This includes its weapons and capabilities, its plans and intentions, its most vulnerable or most strategy targets, and so on. (pp. 262–263)

International Criminal Court (ICC): created by the Treaty of Rome in 1998, this is the world's first permanent international war crimes tribunal. It is based in The Hague, Netherlands, and the court's mandate is to prosecute all war crimes, committed by all sides in all wars. (p. 281)

Marshall Plan: officially called the European Recovery Program, but named after George Marshall, US Secretary of State after World War II, the plan provided a staggering sum of money to Europe to help rebuild after the war, and this rebuilding effort included the primary aggressor of the war, Germany. (p. 287)

Means *mala in se*: literally translates as “methods evil in themselves,” which is an imprecise term that basically means some weapons and means of war are forbidden because they are intrinsically awful; for example, rape as a tool of warfare. (pp. 276, 278)

Non-combatants: those not directly involved in the military conflict, for instance, unarmed civilians. (p. 269)

Non-democratic regimes: governments who do not necessarily enjoy the popular support of the people, and are propped up with the help of the military or other groups. (p. 270)

Non-proliferation: the move to prevent the spread of weaponry throughout the international community, especially when it comes to nuclear weapons. (p. 276)

Jus in bello: Latin for “justice in war.” These are the rules of good conduct aimed at soldiers and officers (those who are actually fighting the war), and embodied in hundreds of treaties, the most prominent being the Hague (1899–1909) and Geneva (1949) Conventions. (p. 268)

Legitimate target: anyone or anything that is part of the war machine (or military-industrial-political complex) of the enemy society. Loosely speaking, it is anything that is a source of potential physical harm to oneself. (p. 269)

Logistics: the ability of a country to supply its armed forces with everything they need to fight, which ranges well beyond weapons to include such things as food, clothing, medicine, and gasoline. (p. 262)

Marines: these soldiers make up a versatile water- and land-based force, originating historically in the corps of brave souls who were the first to disembark from ships and fight their way onto shore and/or those who try to land on enemy ships and take them over, via hand-to-hand combat. (p. 261)

Maximum leverage: the hardest of hard power, when a country's military forces work together during wartime and aim to control the air, water, and land of a given region, complemented by the tools of special forces and cyber-operations. (p. 261)

Military capability: refers to the resources a country has to deploy armed force. Most countries today have an army, a navy, and an air force, each using its own kind of weaponry. (p. 260)

Navy: a water-based force, composed of ships and submarines, and the sailors who operate them. The navy's goal is to secure and hold a given waterway, coastline, or sea route. (p. 261)

Nuclear weapons: unleash an atomic explosion, causing devastation to physical structures and radiation poisoning in people. They are the most destructive weapons yet invented. While a type of WMD, they have not been outlawed by treaty because the major nuclear powers oppose such a move. (pp. 275–276)

Obsolete: when a weapon becomes out-of-date and inferior. (p. 263)

Proportionality: in war, this principle mandates soldiers deploy only proportionate force against legitimate targets. The crude version of this rule is “don't squash a squirrel with a tank or shoot a fly with a cannon”; use force appropriate to the target. (p. 275)

Rehabilitation model: one approach to the post-war peace that shares many similarities to the retribution model, with three notable exceptions: no sanctions, no compensation payments, and it favours forcing regime change. (p. 284)

Reparations payments: payments by the aggressor to its victims (and the broader international community) after the war. These are the equivalent of fines levied on the whole society of the aggressor country. (p. 282)

Reprisal doctrine: permits a reprisal (in violation of the laws of armed conflict), but only in response to a prior violation by the opposing side. (p. 279)

Reprisals: acts of retaliation on an aggressor, typically by the same means used in the original attack. These are not permitted in the laws of armed conflict. (p. 278)

Retribution model: one approach to the post-war peace that assumes the “good” side won and the aggressive side lost. As a result, the purpose after the war is to punish the aggressor. This includes an apology, war crimes trials for those who broke the laws of armed conflict, any gains made by the aggressors must be given up, the aggressors must also be demilitarized and potentially suffer further losses. (pp. 279–282)

Sanctions: fines levied on an aggressor country and designed to hurt and curb the aggressor's future opportunities for economic growth, especially in connection with any goods and services that might enable the aggressor to commit aggression again. (p. 282)

“Shock and awe” campaign: military campaign conducted by the United States during both the 1999 Kosovo War and the 2003 Iraq War, that relied on air power, bombing raids, and cruise missiles to inflict heavy damage on basic infrastructure (especially communications and electricity lines) in Serbia and Baghdad, respectively. (p. 271)

Special forces: these soldiers exist to execute unusual, very specific military objectives, which usually fall under the rubric of measures-short-of-war (MSOW) but still involving the projection of professional, potentially lethal force. (p. 261)

Strategy: big picture plan of how to defeat an enemy. (p. 266)

Symmetrical warfare: classical, open, direct warfare between states or between evenly matched sides (also called conventional warfare). (p. 267)

Tactics: specifically, how one should fight particular battles as pieces in the overall strategy. (p. 266)

Total war: all-out, no-holds-barred, unrestrained, anything-goes warfare. (p. 268)

Treaty of Rome: a multilateral international treaty that created the International Criminal Court (ICC). (p. 281)

Treaty of Versailles: this was signed in 1919 and ended World War I. It applied the retribution model especially harshly, and is widely considered a failure that actually contributed to the conditions that gave rise to World War II. (p. 282)

Turkey shoot: a conflict in which one side has an overwhelming advantage. (p. 275)

Warrior ethos: traditional principle of being willing to put oneself at risk on the battlefield in defence of one's country; at odds with new unmanned systems of warfare like drones. (p. 265)

Waterboarding: a form of torture prohibited by the Geneva Conventions; it involves a drowning-based “question session.” (p. 273)

Weaponized society: current situation in Afghanistan, with nearly all men owning guns and with local tribal leaders protecting their families' farms and crops with their own armed militias. (p. 292)

Weapons of mass destruction (WMDs): weapons capable of generating unusually large casualties and property destruction. These include the NBC weapons: nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons. (p. 275)

Study Questions

Scroll to the end for answers.

1. What are the four emerging military technologies gaining prominence today? Provide an example of each.
2. What are the three types of weapons of mass destruction and which ones have been outlawed by treaty?
3. What are the basic features of the retribution model of post-war peace? Give one example of this model in practice.

Weblinks

Hardcore History Podcast

<https://www.dancarlin.com/hardcore-history-series/>

- An excellent podcast about military history, that goes very in-depth on a variety of subjects; the narrator and creator, Dan Carlin, is a well-known American radio personality and pod-caster

The Vietnam War (PBS Documentary by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick)

<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-vietnam-war/episodes/>

- 10-part TV documentary series on the Vietnam War and its impact both on America and the rest of the world; produced by one of America's most well-known documentarians

Video: Reinventing Japan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LK738CDh21g&t=95s&list=PLyZHoyniQki9uLV39mtt5XO0sYgwBUBrK&index=2>

- Part of a series on the emergence of modern Pacific Asia from the East–West Center, this particular video focuses on the transformation of Japan following World War II and America's impact on Japan's subsequent development, both economically and politically

Further Readings

Sun Tzu. 2002. *The Art of War*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

- One of the oldest military treatises in the world, this short book offers a wealth of information about the methods of warfare.

Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- An in-depth analysis of forms of unconventional resistance by a well-respected American political scientist; it challenges the conventional wisdom that those without power are unable to resist their oppressors.

Johnson, Chalmers. 2004. *Blowback: The Cost and Consequences of American Empire*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

- An interesting book about the unintended consequences of American actions abroad, from projecting military power all over the world, to integrating the global economic system on American terms. The author is a well-known American East Asian specialist, with a focus on Japan.

Ambrose, Stephen E. 2001. *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

- A classic work about ordinary men and their experiences as soldiers during World War II; a *New York Times* bestseller that was later made into a HBO mini-series of the same name.

Answers to Study Questions

1. Four emerging military technologies cyberwarfare (e.g., sabotage via computer-based technologies), non-lethal weapons (e.g., incapacitating agents like “The Dazzler” that blinds people), soldier enhancements (e.g., genetic enhancement), and unmanned systems (e.g., drones). (pp. 263–265)
2. (1) Nuclear weapons, which unleash an atomic explosion damaging both physical buildings and people. (2) Biological weapons release living organisms (like a virus or bacteria) capable of harming or killing those exposed to it. (3) Chemical weapons unleash a gas or some other chemical, that also kills or harms those exposed to it. Both biological and chemical weapons have been outlawed by treaty, but nuclear weapons have not, because the nuclear powers oppose outright banning these weapons since they themselves possess the weapons. (pp. 275–276)
3. The basic features include a public peace treaty; exchange of prisoners-of-war (POWs); apology from the aggressor; war crimes for those responsible; aggressor must give up any gains; aggressor must be demilitarized; and aggressor must suffer further losses (like reparation payments and sanctions). The results of the First Persian Gulf War in 1991 are an example of the retribution model. (pp. 279–284)