Lessons from the History of the Politics of Warfare

By Frank H. Denton, PhD

This paper is an adjunct to the main paper titled, Nexus—OIL and AL Qaeda, detailing some of the data supporting conclusions presented in the Nexus paper.

Between the year 1400 and the end of the 20th century there were 1029 incidents of warfare recorded in the literate world, an average of 1.7 new wars started per year. Recently wars have tended to be more frequent; in the second half of the 20th century an average of over three new wars were started each year.

I conducted an extensive study of the political aspects of these wars – the issues that were in conflict, the political relationships of the participants and the results. A detailed presentation of the results from this study is available at KNOWING THE ROOTS OF WAR. Here I summarize patterns that have occurred with such regularity that I have chosen to call them lessons.

Mankind has experienced thousands of incidents of warfare. Many of the reasons for undertaking warfare occur and recur and the results tend to fall into certain patterns. Presumably these regularities exist because we are all creatures of our histories taking away and repeating certain lessons and because humans have certain common ways of behaving as they seek to serve their own interests.

Part I of the main paper points out, in summary, how a recurring pattern — that of increased financial capacity — has commonly resulted in nations and other groups using warfare more often to manage their conflicts with others. It was suggested that this was an obvious lesson of history and we should have seen the results that were likely as we poured money into the coffers of Middle Eastern Nations to purchase their oil. Seemingly inevitably these new found riches lead to a desire to rejuvenate the Islamic Community and to resolve through violence some of their long standing conflicts with the West.

The patterns which I cite as lessons are found in the history of the politics of warfare. Will they recur in the future? Many are likely to say that the events of the past are unique and are not repeated. But, certainly the More Money leads to More Warfare pattern is recurring today as Islam with its oil riches gets ever more aggressive. Other lessons also seem to be showing up in our world today.

Second on my list of lessons is one that derives from the high frequency of past failures to achieve objectives in initiating warfare (in using pre-emptive warfare). There is a pattern of repeated failures for the attacking party in more than 500 incidents over the past two centuries. The invasion of Iraq maybe is not yet to be classified as a failure, but it certainly has not produced the change of Iraq to a democratic, peaceful state that was touted as the objective.

A third lesson is that occupying the moral high ground in warfare tends to enhance the likelihood of success. Again referring to Iraq, in the minds of many America did not occupy the moral high ground and in consequence lost support from traditional allies and from the international community more generally. In contrast the initial successes in Afghanistan followed on an attack that many judged morally correct, given the Taliban’s harboring
Lessons from the History of the Politics of Warfare

of Al Qaeda. History does seem to be repeating itself.

Certain actions and results have proven more likely than others in the past. The lessons cited here are based on patterns that have been repeated event after event. They are factual descriptions of the past and there is evidence that the ignoring of these lessons is costing us today. These are cautionary lessons, not hard and fast rules for policy development.

MORE MONEY, MORE WARFARE

This lesson came as a bit of a shock to me. Despite a lifetime (professional and personal) of running from war to war I had a mindset that Peace was the normal state of affairs. In looking at many different parts of the record of warfare it slowly dawned on me that wars were not isolated events, deviating from the normal state of being at peace, but were part of a stable system of violent conflict. In one aspect after another a recurrent feature of the data on warfare was stability over time. It was shown that the same number of wars were started year after year, that the same groups fought again and again, groups tended to fight at stable rates and so forth.

Figure 1 shows a stability of the type I am referring to. From 1400 to 1800 on a worldwide basis there were a constant 130 wars per century, plus or minus about 3 percent. In the subsequent figures we will see similar patterns of stability within certain groups of nations. Another example of a stable pattern is that for five centuries a stable 11 percent of all wars were between Islam and the West.

A major deviation from this pattern of stability was that after four centuries of stability, the number of new war starts in the world then doubled between the 18th and 19th centuries. The next graph [figure 2] shows how Western warfare levels surged, almost tripling in the 19th century following the industrial revolution. Both stability and the change were too pronounced to be readily explained as a random statistical process, something systemic had to have changed. Originally I thought of this as representing the consequences of a change in technology with horse, wind and water power being replaced by steam.

That conclusion had an element of truth but did not go far enough. Let me extend it here. I went outside of the data set and read a range of histories of warfare in the ages before modern governmental revenue systems were developed and was struck by the repeated references to how kings struggled to find means of raising the money to finance the wars they wanted to fight. Of course, I readily accepted that wars were very expensive and tended to overtax revenue systems. I concluded as noted above that warfare has been an accepted aspect of world politics, and that it was perhaps financial capacity that constrained the frequency of warfare. The four centuries of stability in number of wars fought reflected a stable industrial technology producing a more or less stable financial capacity. In consequence warfare participation rates remained rather steady.
I decided in testing this idea to see if I could find instances where revenues increased and there was little concurrent change in technology, since such a pattern would undercut my original explanation, which was the evolution of steam power that underlay the increase in warfare rates shown for the 19th century. If such a situation could be found and if the increase in money was followed by more wars, this would provide supporting evidence that financial capacity was the constraining factor in use of warfare. I found that Spain, in the 16th century, doubled its rate of use of warfare in the years following the plundering of the Aztec and Inca’s gold and silver. Soon thereafter Sweden became a major actor in the religious wars as it started to export its very high quality iron ores.

I had already found that for almost any period in the 19th and 20th centuries three of the nations with greatest financial capacity – UK, US and France – were consistently ranked 1, 2 and 3 in rate of use of warfare. England had as well increased its already high rate of use of warfare by about 50 percent following its early industrial revolution. The evidence supporting the financial capacity argument was getting rather strong.

After a good deal of blundering about, intellectually, the obvious occurred to me. In many respects the 20th century oil revenue surge that went to Middle Eastern nations occurred without a corresponding technological change. At the same time, the opportunities for the use of violence were many. Most Islamic governments were weak, inefficient and often corrupt. Efforts at domestic reform were certainly to be expected. Moreover, the Islamic lands had their traditional Christian antagonists to the West and North while to the East there were the long standing struggles with the Hindus and even the Buddhists in Thailand and the far flung Christian enclave in the Philippines.

Conflicts were plentiful; would I see the financial effect? Deductively, if the relationship is to hold, we should expect a rather steady low level in the use of warfare extending on through the 19th century. Islam experienced little effect from the industrial revolution that increased the West’s warfare levels in the 19th century. But, by the early 20th century the picture should change. Another graph [figure 3] shows a remarkable pattern. Intra-Islam warfare levels were absolutely stable for five hundred years through the 19th century.
The lands of Islam, often desert or semi-desert lands, were poor. The region had been experiencing almost no economic change. Somehow it appears that the financial capacity, pre-industrial, could handle 14 wars per century, and conflicts of interest beyond that level had to be endured or managed by other means.

What about following oil? Turning to the 20th century we see the same tripling of warfare levels that the West experienced a century earlier [figure 4].

The next chart [figure 5] expands the empirical evidence to show evolution within the 20th century. Oil revenues began to accrue in Iran by 1912 with the first exports and in the 1920s in Saudi Arabia with the selling of concessions to explore for oil. It was mid century and in the fourth quarter that revenues experienced a huge surge. The ratio of wars of Islam to wars of the West tracks these trends with considerable precision such that by the last quarter of the 20th century after centuries of relative “peacefulness” Islam finally was able to finance more wars than the West.
If we try to take this and the other empirical evidence as well as qualitative historical knowledge, the following axioms seem to convey some essential truths about the world of warfare.

1. Conflicts of interest between nations and between other political groups are plentiful and always present.
2. Warfare is the traditional instrument for attempting to manage the more important conflicts in the most advantageous manner possible.
3. Within constraints of cultural acceptance of warfare and emotional tolerance, conflicts are managed through the use of warfare in proportion to a group’s financial capacity.
4. Essentially all cultures have accepted warfare as a valid institution, but perhaps with varying propensities to use that institution. The Chinese for example seem to have used warfare less often than most other civilizational groups. With the limited data available in this analysis it is hard to differentiate propensities for other groups.
5. Emotional tolerance for warfare appears to be inversely proportional to the frequency and costs (physical and economic) of warfare within the past generation. As Vietnam was for the US, costly and not very successful wars are followed by an extended period of “never again.”

There is some direct evidence as cited in the Nexus paper of the use of oil revenues to sponsor a fundamentalist, reformist view of Islam. And we know that revenues are coming from the oil producing states to finance violence in Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan as well as to promote world wide terrorism. The relationship fits conventional wisdom quite well. The advance here is to show with hard evidence the relationship.

**The lessons are that we should have seen it coming back in the 1940s and that we are financing them to kill us. Rather disturbing conclusions!**

**PRE-EMPTIVE WARFARE**

The enormously popular novelist on international affairs, Tom Clancy, had his fictional National Security Advisor Jack Ryan advise the President on starting wars.

*Germany and Austria started the war [WWI]. They both lost. World War Two, Japan and Germany took on the whole world; it never occurred to them that the rest of the world might be stronger. Particularly true of Japan. Ryan went on. They never really had a plan to defeat us. Hold on that for a moment. The Civil War, started by the South. The South lost. The Franco-Prussian War, started by France, France lost. Almost every war since the Industrial Revolution was initiated by the side which ultimately lost. Q.E.D. going to war is not a rational act. Therefore, the thinking behind it, the why, isn’t necessarily important because it is probably erroneous to begin with.* From Tom Clancy’s *Debt of Honor*

This is rather a bold statement by Clancy, in essence that the leaders of world have repeatedly started wars on irrational grounds. One can easily think of other cases of starting wars and failing to achieve objectives. Argentina failed to take the Falklands, the UK and France failed to retain the Suez Canal, the US intervened but did not prevent a communist takeover in Vietnam, Iraq did not succeed against Iran nor did it get to keep tiny Kuwait. Are such cases exceptions or are they the rule as Jack Ryan, presumably speaking for Clancy, suggests?

Despite the prohibition against aggressive warfare under United Nations “law” and the Clancy statements regarding failures, the Bush administration adopted as policy the right to use warfare pre-emptively when it judged it to be appropriate. The only clear pre-emptive action to date under that policy has been the invasion of Iraq. I would accept that the actions against Afghanistan fall somewhat into the gray area not being clearly pre-emptive since that nation was providing safe haven to a group undertaking military action against the US. The jury is not yet in on Iraq, but the results to date certainly have not been those that the American public was led to expect. What is the factual evidence regarding past successes and failures in initiating warfare?
The data base I have assembled has more than five hundred cases in which I have determined both which party fired first and the outcome of the war relative to the apparent intent in attacking. I present the data in the following paragraphs. But, before detailing the facts let me say that the conclusions from those data astounded me – I had read Clancy, but discounted Ryan ’s sage advice.

In a sentence: Absent a major power advantage, for more than two hundred years in more than five hundred incidents the party firing first has succeeded in reaching its apparent aims in less than half of those incidents and the success rate has fallen below 30 percent in the past half century.

Of course, individual circumstances tend toward the unique and what has happened on average in the past may provide little guidance regarding the future. Nonetheless with such a stark track record of failure for those nations starting wars surely one must be given pause in thinking of establishing a policy of pre-emptive warfare. Is there further evidence on success and failure, under what circumstances, as to what might be the causes of such poorly formulated decisions, and do some types of governments do better than others?

With the data I have available I can provide some limited responses to these questions and issues, but much work remains to be done. There is, nonetheless, more than enough evidence to lead me to conclude as a citizen, that I would not like for my government to undertake attacking another nation except when the provocation is very strong and clear for both our people and our friends and potential allies to see. Let me get on to the data at this point.

The definition that I developed for indicating success or failure needs to be clearly defined. I used the historians’ descriptions of the issues in conflict which lead to the war and defined success as reaching something like a favorable resolution on those issues, a single issue prevailed more commonly. Failure was defined as not reaching a favorable resolution. Failure often entailed defeat, but not necessarily. A stand off was defined for my purposes as failure. Thus, undertaking war to grab control of the Falklands as Argentina did was a serious business involving death and destruction as well as expense. Not getting the islands was classed as a failure although Argentina itself was not attacked.

For the two century period (1800 to 2000) I was able to record the aggressor and the results in 535 incidents. The aggressor failed in just over half of the incidents in the 19th century. Looking just at the incidents occurring since 1950, failure dominated with fewer than 30 percent of the attacking parties reaching their objectives. These are across the board results. I did not expect such a preponderance of failures – warfare is clearly a serious business and should, I would think, be undertaken only when there are good chances of success. It was clearly necessary to look in more depth at what has taken place over the years.

An unweighted average success for both centuries and for all zero or one step power difference combinations gives the result in the table which follows.

SUCCESS RATES IN INITIATING WARFARE FOR 19th & 20th CENTURIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</th>
<th>PERCENT SUCCESS IN STARTING WARFARE</th>
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<tr>
<td>535</td>
<td>34</td>
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For the 535 combatants in over 230 wars, during a two century period, excluding big power/small power fights, the initiating party failed to win two thirds of the time. This is a remarkable finding in my judgment. It needs to be verified with further research. However, I am convinced that the pattern shown is essentially that which will come from any further investigations of these or other data.

Nonetheless, coding outcome for some of the cases was difficult. I felt it useful to go back and do the same exercise for the 18th century data even though the political systems are less relevant for modern
circumstances. The results are in the following table. Coding of success/fail was even more difficult for the complex dynastic wars of Europe in the 18th century. Nonetheless, results tend to track along the same pattern as for the 19th and 20th centuries. For zero or one step power differences, about two thirds of the time the party starting the fighting does not achieve its objectives.

SUCCESS RATES IN INITIATING WARFARE FOR 18th CENTURY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</th>
<th>PERCENT SUCCESS IN STARTING WARFARE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>35</td>
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If one assumes that undertaking fighting was, or should have been, done with the expectation of achieving objectives (succeeding in these terms), the decision making apparatus has failed miserably. Given the costs of wars in lives and treasure, success rates of 70 to 80 percent would seemingly be the lower edge of what would be classed as good performance by leaders. If one is not reasonably certain of achieving objectives, the logical choice seemingly would be to never start the fight.

In the above data set I ignored the relative power situation. Clearly relative power should have a significant effect on outcome. I went back to the data and classified each of the parties involved as a small, medium or large nation and re-computed success rates for the different power combinations.

19th century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Power</th>
<th>Initiate Fight % Success</th>
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<tr>
<td>same</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one step stronger</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two step stronger</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one step weaker</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two step weaker</td>
<td>11</td>
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20th century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Power</th>
<th>Initiate Fight % Success</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>same</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one step stronger</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two step stronger</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one step weaker</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two step weaker</td>
<td>27</td>
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</table>

As expected, power is a very important factor in determining success as the preceding tables show. Again, however, the results surprised me. A large power attacking a small power succeeds at a well above average rate. But, with loss of lives and treasure that are inevitable aspects of warfare, I had expected success rates for big powers certainly higher than the 60 percent figure that has been achieved in recent times. These tables speak for themselves in large measure. In the hope of developing a better understanding, I looked at different forms of government and found that democracies tend to do somewhat better than do dictatorships, but still do not achieve a dominantly successful record.

Clearly, from these data one cannot escape a conclusion that the world’s leaders have repeatedly led their people into unsuccessful wars. A lesson that we as citizens need to seriously consider.

MORAL POSITIONING

In the prior section I referred to the party that attacked first as the aggressor. This is a term that implies a certain moral opprobrium. I suspect that in part the poor record of success in initiating warfare relates to community perceptions that such acts of aggression are at least morally suspect if not fully immoral. The data are not available at this time to enable a statistical test of this supposition.

On an anecdotal basis there are some suggestive examples that can be cited. When North Korea moved south
in 1950 a large coalition under UN auspices was quickly assembled to oppose, with military force, that act of “aggression.” Iraq brought down on itself a coalition that even included several Arab nations when it attempted to seize Kuwait. Hitler’s efforts at aggrandizement as well as Napoleon’s similar aspirations a century earlier were ultimately opposed by grand coalitions.

It would not be wise to judge these actions in purely moral terms for clearly the coalitions were formed in part in response to perceived threats of one party acquiring a dominant power position. At the same time pure power considerations seldom seem to guide the actions of nations. International law, weak as it is, is commonly cited as the basis for taking a particular position on issues in question. One can think of the positions of France and Germany, as examples, when their traditional ally, the United States, undertook to invade Iraq. Both nations stayed on the sidelines claiming the available intelligence evidence did not support a pre-emptive invasion.

I searched the data that I had assembled in an effort to determine if there was information available that would enable me to get some evidence of a quantitative nature that would answer in part the question of how important moral positioning is or is not in influencing success in warfare. With a listing of the issues which lead to warfare I had some basis for determining when a party initiating warfare, I will use the term aggressor, was pursuing a policy course that was considered consistent with internationally accepted values.

I had data on success rates for the 19th century and for the 20th. I had already determined that success rates for starting wars in the 20th century were well below the rates found in the 19th century data. This suggested to me a moral positioning effect. I needed to look further into how the success rates varied in each century in wars started for different reasons.

The 19th century was still a time of kings for most countries. The tradition of wars of aggrandizement and for maintaining a power balance was still present and in varying degrees such wars were considered acceptable. Balance of power politics was still widely practiced and a relatively acceptable behavior for nations in the 19th century. It was presumed that it was the right of monarchies to pursue their interests by means of force. International Relations scholar K. J. Holsti notes [In the European tradition] War... was highly institutionalized. It was recognized as a legitimate form of statecraft, to be used at the decision of dynast...to advance state interests, including the honor and prestige of the monarch. Changes were beginning to be felt following the American and French revolutions.

But, changing this systemic view largely awaited the 20th century. In modern times Quincy Wright observes that War has tended...to be regarded as more abnormal and more in need of rational justification.

Also, by the 20th century social values were clearly changing. Human rights, national self determination, equality of opportunity were now important values where in the 19th century these concepts were just being formed. Another change was that with the establishment of the United Nations the only wars that were permitted within the UN framework were wars of self defense.

Recognizing these time dependent changes I now had some basis for determining how important moral positioning was in influencing success rates in starting wars. Given the above observations on value change, I assumed:

1. Starting a war over traditional aggrandizement and power balancing concerns should not show much of a correlation with success rate in the 19th century, but for 20th century wars, initiating a war to achieve such objectives would put the party into a poor moral position and if this factor is important should be associated with lower success rates.
2. Some wars are more moral than others. To fight for human rights, today, places a party in a better light. I expected that for the 20th century those parties initiating a war in which human rights issues prevailed would do better than average. In contrast, I expected no such pattern for 19th century warfare.
To make a preliminary test on these presumptions I combined several of the issues in conflict variables into a single index of power (realpolitik) politics and another set of issues into a second, humanitarian index. I then examined the success rates for initiators in the two centuries.

The row in the humanitarian index labeled lo gives the summary value on success for those wars in which humanitarian issues were less important. The row labeled hi contains results for those wars in which racial equality, economic fairness and self determination (humanitarian concerns) were the important issues listed by historians. With similar logic in the table below, the row labeled lo in the realpolitik index shows success results for those wars fought over issues other than power and territory.

### EFFECTS OF PURSUING HUMANITARIAN ISSUES ON SUCCESS RATES

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>19th century</th>
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<th>20th century</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>humanitarian index</td>
<td>% Success if start</td>
<td></td>
<td>% Success if start</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lo</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hi</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
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The results are as expected. Being an aggressor should have provided only a modest disadvantage in an era when power politics was considered acceptable. Moreover, prevalent beliefs regarding racial inferiority of non-Western peoples should have meant that there was little advantage for an aggressor to pursue humanitarian issues of national self determination, racial equality of opportunity and so forth.

However, with restrictions on aggressive warfare in the 20th century and the emphases on human rights we would expect quite different results. The expectations are born out. Initiating warfare is a risky business in the 20th century. Fighting for human rights related issues enhances success rates but still up to only a 50-50 result.

If we look at results of initiating warfare over power or realpolitik issues we would expect not much effect in the 19th century and a major impact for the 20th century and such is the case.

### REALPOLITIK ISSUES

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<th></th>
<th>19th century</th>
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<th>20th century</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realpolitik index</td>
<td>% Success if start</td>
<td></td>
<td>% Success if start</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lo</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hi</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
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With respect to realpolitik, aggressors should find relatively little disadvantage in pursuit of power politics in the 19th century and experience major disadvantages in the 20th century. The statistical results are consistent with expectations. In the 20th century an aggressor pursuing power politics was almost sure to fail.

A fundamental question the answer to which will determine much about our future in the 21st century is that of **what will be the moral basis for warfare mobilization in the coming years?** Will Islamic fundamentalism or Christian human rights, or neither prevail?

### POWER OR MORALITY

It was also possible to use the data I had developed to roughly explore possible interaction between relative power levels and moral positions of the combatants. I had previously shown the effects of relative power on
success rates. In the following table I make an effort to see how great the effect is of the moral position (as I interpret these data) compared to the power position.

MORALITY OR POWER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Position</th>
<th>19th century Start Fight, % Success</th>
<th>20th century Start Fight, % Success</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power-same</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power, 1 step advantage</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power, 2 step advantage</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realist Issues-Low</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realist Issues-High</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Issues-Low</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Issues-High</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
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Each power step advantage averaged gives about 20 percentage points increase in expected success rate. Overall success rates were, as noted, lower in the 20th century for the aggressor, but the power step differential is similar. As expected neither the realist/power issues nor the humanitarian issues were strongly related to success rates in the 19th century. However, in the 20th century pursuit of realist/power issues by the aggressor had a negative effect of 30 or more percentage points on success rate, while pursuit of humanitarian issues produced a positive 30 percentage points.

These numbers seem rather large to me and on the grounds of common sense I would treat them with caution. Unfortunately the sample sizes are not such that I can do power differential and issue variations together. If I make a linear arithmetic interpretation in the 20th century, to fight over humanitarian issues is worth 1 to 1.5 steps in power difference, while to pursue power politics results in a similar virtual loss in power position.

STOPPING A WAR

Many generals and politicians, at least from U.S. Grant, have commented that wars may be easy enough to start; stopping a war is altogether a different matter as emotions of hatred, fear of disgrace and so forth become prevalent.

In what must be considered as a classic conversation, Richard Holbrooke quotes Izetbegovic of Bosnia and Milosovic of Yugoslavia at a dinner party held during the Dayton peace negotiations in 1995. Holbrooke's wife assigned the role of ameliorating the hostility between these two leaders of the Balkans asked them:

*How did the war start? Did you know that your initial disagreements would lead to this terrible conflict? I did not think the fighting would be so serious, Said Izetbegovic. Milosovic nodded in agreement and added. I never thought it would go on so long.*

Holbrooke writes; *it was a striking conversation. They both professed surprise at the dimensions of what they had unleashed. Yet neither man had made a serious effort to stop the war until forced to do so by the United States.*

If there is one most important finding in this work it is that repeatedly wars are started with the most limited understanding of the probable consequences. Just as repeatedly wars once started are not easily stopped by the leaders initiating them. This tradition of seeking a solution through a contest of relative abilities to administer violence when no other solution offers much appeal is a root cause of war. Izetbegovic and Milosovic are only two among many, many leaders of our political processes who have not foreseen what they were about to wrought. Here is certainly a clue as to how we might contain violence and destruction even without totally exorcizing it.
To look into this question in more detail in this search I coded all conflicts that were started during the 20th century, about 245 conflicts. For each conflict, I coded two variables: a) was there an earlier war between the same combatants over the same or very similar issues (within the prior 25 years) and b) was there a war over the same or very similar issues within the 25 years following the end of the fighting.

I was able to make an acceptable coding of results for over 200 of the wars of the 20th century. Of these, 50 percent were followed by another similar war within 25 years of termination. Some 55 percent had been preceded in the prior 25 years by a similar war. The unit of analysis is different from the prior discussion regarding an initiator achieving objectives. In that analysis the unit was the combatant. Here I look at the war (all combatants) rather than at particular participants. The data show that in the 20th century, somewhat more than half the time a war has to be re-fought, presumably because no satisfactory conclusion was reached with a single fight.

Even more than one re-fight seems to have been necessary in many cases. For wars that had been preceded by a prior war (25 year time limit) over similar issues, another war followed 63% of the time. That is, something like a third of cases involve three or more successive wars, perhaps still with no resolution of the conflict leading to the war.

RATE OF FOLLOW-ON WARS  (ALL TYPES OF WARS)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO PRE WAR</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE WAR</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
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When a clash of civilizations is involved a follow-on war is even more likely. The gist of the lesson is that wars breed their offspring. Starting proves much easier than stopping. Again Iraq seems to fall right in line with this historical pattern.

**GREAT POWER SYNDROME**

Here I must depart from the statistical work that I have done. I can point out that big powers fight more wars than other nations. But, I do not have the data to show that the fighting of those wars rather than strengthening the big power over time tends to erode its superior power. For this lesson of history I refer to our folklore on the decline of the great powers from the fall of the Roman Empire to the implosion of the USSR and to the work of Paul Kennedy on the great powers from the 16th century forward.

The over commitments of Britain and of the USSR seem obvious enough. Their expenditures on military ventures were so great that they undercut their economic positions. This is of course Paul Kennedy’s primary conclusion which he derives from a massive search of financial patterns over most of the time period covered in my data – 500 of the 600 years.

In Part II of the main paper I show how undertaking military action against the Islamists tends to significantly increase the size of their financial base and, given the critical importance of financing in sustaining and succeeding at warfare, suggest that military actions have a self defeating component.

If one accepts the validity of Kennedy’s conclusions the lesson is clear enough, the Great Powers have used military interventions with such frequency that the costs to their economy have outweighed any potential advantages that might accrue to the pursuit of those military ventures. If we follow through the above list of lessons we may see some of the reasons why the use of military interventions which were clearly aimed at enhancing power instead contributed to the dissipation of power.

Great powers fight more often, the starting of a war more often than not does not produce the desired result, wars have to be fought again and sometimes yet again, they drag on creating yet more costs and most importantly in the West against Islam struggle, the more we have fought the more we have enhanced the
financial capacity of Islam to conduct warfare.

Are our leaders ignorant of this history? Are we living through the beginning of the fall of the American great power position?

— Frank Denton

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