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“NEW WARS” AND RUMORS OF “NEW WARS”

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Recently, there has been a growing tendency to suggest “new” classes of wars that are presumably different from all wars we have known and studied. In this article, we discuss the extent to which the landscape of armed conflict has changed so dramatically that it has necessitated a revision of the prevalent typology of war, a reconsideration of the correlates of war, and a reconceptualization of the theoretical assumptions regarding the etiology of war. While it is clear that patterns of warfare shift across time and space, it is not clear that war itself has changed “fundamentally” and has become inexplicable in light of theoretical arguments in world politics as many “new war” theorists suggest. Our analysis demonstrates that many of the “new wars” are simply amalgamations of various interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars—i.e., the “old wars”—that have been lumped into a single category. The result is a hodgepodge of armed conflicts whose different correlates derive from their diverse morphologies rather than their novelty as wars unlike any we have experienced previously.

KEY WORDS: international wars, civil wars, new wars, peoples’ wars, postmodern wars

During the three decades since the inception of the Correlates of War (COW) project, we have followed the conventional trichotomy of interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars, seeking to generalize about these three types of war, based as they are on the political status of the protagonists. In the past decade, however, there has been a growing tendency to suggest “new” types of wars and to urge that these “new wars” are quite unlike and appreciably different from all wars we have known and
studied, and thus must be examined and described as a separate genus (e.g., Gray, 1997; Holsti, 1996, 1997; Kaldor, 1999; Rice, 1988). This strikes us as both inaccurate and inefficient and ignore the extensive similarities between the “new wars” and those found in extant categories of war. This could encourage a proliferation of quite arbitrary categories of war requiring new variables, new operationalizations, etc., producing an odd and idiosyncratic typology that undermines cumulation and comparative testing of rival theoretical models.

One counter to the inefficiency critique is that the political phenomena that we study in world politics are complicated, and this requires that one sacrifice efficiency in order to adequately explain referent world phenomena. However, with respect to the novelty of the “new wars,” this argument must address the possibility that these wars are adequately subsumed under extant categories of war and really are not “new” at all. We contend that “new wars” are actually an amalgam of different types of “old wars” and that once we separately analyze the domestic and international wars that constitute the “new war” categories, this will be quite clear. Further, contrary to the assertion of “new war” theorists, war has not changed “fundamentally,” with respect to its “purpose,” types of participants, and the manner of its prosecution.

In this essay, we critically examine the claims of “new war” theorists. First, we review several “new war” arguments and discuss the alleged changes in warfare that they argue have necessitated new classificatory schema. Next we provide a closer examination of the extent to which war has changed “fundamentally.” Following closely the criteria of the “new war” theorists themselves, we separately analyze the international and domestic wars that comprise the “new war” categories in order to determine the extent to which the “new wars” are actually the “old wars” given new names. The importance of comparing the “new” and “old” wars is that if it is found that these are the same wars, then it is difficult to argue—as “new war” theorists do—that the existence of “new wars” necessitates new categories of warfare and novel theoretical explanations for their occurrence. Finally, we recapitulate our main argument and discuss its implications for future research on war in world politics.

“NEW WARS,” “POSTMODERN WARS,” “WARDS OF THE THIRD KIND,” AND “PEOPLES’ WARS”

The various “new war” theses rest on several common empirical claims. First, they argue that the locus of conflict in the world has shifted from Europe to postcolonial regions. Second, they suggest that conflict has shifted from disputes between states to disputes within states. Third, they maintain that these “new wars” are dissimilar in purpose, practice, and (type of) participants from the “old wars”—such as the interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars found in the COW typology—that have been the major concern of scholars of world politics (see Small & Singer, 1982; Reid-Sarkees, 2000); therefore, they constitute a novel form of war and necessitate a novel theoretical explication of their etiology. Fourth, they insist that since the etiology of these wars is distinct from that of other types of wars, then the correlates of these wars are likely to be much different from those of other wars, and, therefore, “new wars” require different strategies to reduce their likelihood.

In order to substantiate these claims, “new war” scholars need to clearly demon-
strate that their wars are “fundamentally” different from previous ones, and their task should begin with a clear definition and delineation of these wars. Having described the “new wars,” they should propose theoretical arguments for their occurrence, and, one would expect that the processes involved in these “new wars” would not be common to the “old wars”—thus, the “newness” of the former. Next, “new war” theorists should systematically differentiate the correlates of their “new wars” from those of the “old wars” to show how the processes that generate the former are not identical to those that generate the latter. This would provide powerful support for their claims. Before we discuss the extent to which “new war” theorists provide such evidence, it is necessary to get a better sense of what constitutes the “new wars,” themselves.

In the sections that follow, we introduce the reader to four types of “new wars” and the authors associated with theses related to each. These include Kaldor’s “new wars,” Gray’s “postmodern wars,” Rice’s “wars of the third kind,” and Holsti’s “peoples’ wars.” After a brief overview of the authors’ discussion of what constitutes these wars, in the subsequent section, we review the theoretical arguments that the authors use to explain their emergence and the authors suggested policies to prevent them. At the outset, it is important to point out that although we are quite critical of the conclusions drawn by the various authors with respect to “new wars” we also think that there is much that is useful in their analyses. Moreover, we encourage critical inquiry into the manner by which we categorize armed conflict because such inquiry may allow us to refine or redefine extant typologies of war and help us to generate more meaningful analyses of the factors leading to war and those necessary for peace. It is these concerns that guide the discussion that follows.

**Kaldor’s “New Wars”**

“New wars,” according to Kaldor (1999, p. 6) “can be contrasted with earlier wars in term of their goals, the methods of warfare and how they are financed.” For her, these wars, which were prefigured in Mao’s insurgency in China (pp. 29–30) and are exemplified by the recent war in Bosnia-Herzegovenia (p. 31), are rooted in divergent claims to power based on “national, clan, religious or linguistic” characteristics of groups (pp. 6, 76–79) in a context of simultaneous globalization and localization and the “disintegration or erosion of modern state structures” (p. 78). The key role of identity in these wars seems to dictate that the objective of the belligerents is “to control the population by getting rid of everyone of a different identity . . . Hence the strategic goal of these wars is population expulsion through various means, such as mass killing, forcible resettlement, as well as a range of political, psychological, and economic techniques of intimidation” (p. 8). Participants in these wars primarily employ guerrilla and counterinsurgency strategies (pp. 7–8), which aim less at the physical control of territory through military advance than at the political control of the population. However, Kaldor (p. 8) asserts that “whereas guerrilla warfare . . . aimed to capture ‘hearts and minds,’ the new warfare borrows from counterinsurgency techniques of destabilization aimed at sowing ‘fear and hatred’.” These wars are financed through a “globalized war economy” where the “fighting units finance themselves through plunder and the black market or through external
assistance” such as remittances from their diasporas, siphoning off of humanitarian assistance, and/or support from third parties through illicit trade in arms, drugs, diamonds, and oil (p. 9). Kaldor adds that “[a]ll of these sources can only be sustained through continued violence so that a war logic is built into the functioning of the economy” (p. 9). Further, she maintains that this “retrograde set of social relationships, which is entrenched by war, has a tendency to spread across borders through refugees or organized crime or ethnic minorities (p. 9). Therefore, although the “new wars” primarily emerge from intrastate factors, they may swiftly metamorphose into interstate armed conflicts.

Gray’s “Postmodern Wars”

Kaldor is not alone in proffering a new category of war. Gray (1997, p. 158), building on Jameson (1984) maintains that the Vietnam War was the first “postmodern war.” Such wars are characterized by the use of computer-assisted weapons technology and especially computer-aided artificial intelligence among one or more of the belligerents. Gray (1997) notes that there have been many labels applied to this “new class of wars” ranging from “permanent war,” “techno-war,” “cyber war,” “hyperreal war,” “information war,” “neocortical war,” and “Third Wave war;” however, he insists that “[t]hough all of these labels have something to recommend them, none do justice to the complexity and sweeping nature of war’s recent changes” (p. 22). He settles on “postmodern war” as a label for “two good reasons.” First, he maintains that the “logic and culture of modern war changed significantly during World War II” (p. 22). Second, he maintains that since information is presumably important to postmodernity in the arts, literature, economics, and philosophy, and since information—and computers to process it—is now “the single most significant military factor” (p. 22), then “postmodern” as an appellation seems appropriate as a label for these wars.

According to Gray (p. 247), these wars are marked by the increased role of “technoscience.” He’s not as focused on the participants of war or the role of cultural identity and several other factors that are of concern to Kaldor, for example; nevertheless, like Kaldor’s “new war,” “[p]ostmodern war depends on international tension and the resulting arms race that keep weapons development at a maximum and actual military conflict between major powers at a minimum” (p. 23). This type of warfare is exemplified by the Gulf War, in which the strategy and tactics of the winning coalition were facilitated by sophisticated high-technology data generating and information-processing equipment, and battlefield engagements often approximated a form of “cyberwar” where belligerents (primarily in the case of the UN coalition) relied on high-technology “smart” weapons systems to engage the adversary.

Rice’s “Wars of the Third Kind”

Other authors agree that the Vietnam War signaled the emergence of a new type of war, but they do not emphasize the high-tech aspect of these armed conflicts. For example, Rice (1988) focuses on the protracted, generally nonconventional, largely intrastate wars that typified the armed conflicts raging throughout the postcolonial
Rice’s “wars of the third kind” are limited to predominantly rural Third World states. He maintains that “[i]t is in the rural areas of the underdeveloped lands of the so-called Third World, and only in such lands, that wars of the third kind take place” (p. 51). He asserts that “wars of the third kind” have occurred in Afghanistan, Burma, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaya, the Philippines, Algeria, Ethiopia, Angola, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, and that “what each country had [in common] was an underdeveloped and predominantly rural economy.” The “radicalized initiatives” pursued by the insurgents to achieve their political ends arise in such countries because only a rural environment provides the supportive context for the insurgent guerrilla force (p. 53). Although nationalism is often a motivation for insurgency (p. 78), Rice insists that where the problems facing predominantly rural third world states are “fundamental,” then initiatives “that have been defeated or suppressed are likely to reemerge and . . . become radicalized” and provide the raison d’être for “wars of the third kind” (p. 51).

Holsti’s “Peoples’ Wars”

Rice’s (1988) observations became the point of departure for Holsti’s (1996) analysis of post-World War II armed conflicts in the former colonial world. In his study, Holsti provides a more detailed empirical and theoretical analysis of “wars of the third kind,” which he calls “peoples’ wars” (p. 28). For Holsti, “peoples’ wars” are demonstrably different in their manner of prosecution, the types of participants involved, and their purpose(s) as compared to the conventional institutionalized wars that preoccupied Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, or even the total warfare that emerged first with the Napoleonic Wars and reached its zenith with the two world wars of the twentieth century. Whereas institutionalized warfare consisted largely of limited campaigns “fought by centrally controlled, permanent, full-time professional armed forces in the service of the state” (p. 29), “peoples’ wars” are primarily guerrilla campaigns fought by militarized communal groups against either government forces or other militarized groups within the states (pp. 36–38). In institutionalized warfare, Holsti avers, there was a recognition of certain “rules of the game” such as the modalities of tactical engagement and norms on the treatment of noncombatants. In “peoples’ wars,” the line between combatant and noncombatant is blurred if not completely wiped away, as members of rival communal groups are targeted out of fear that their membership may be a source of potential power for their rivals. Holsti adds that “[i]n eighteenth-century wars, very few had a stake in
outcomes. The ‘sport of princes’ was played in far-off fields. In wars of the third kind, the deadly game is played in every home, church, government office, school, highway, and village” (p. 39).

“Peoples’ wars” are also distinguished from the total wars epitomized by the highly institutionalized wars of mass destruction of the previous century (i.e., World War I, World War II). The latter were primarily interstate wars where there were clear fronts and demarcations between soldiers and civilians, while in “peoples’ war,” Holsti (p. 36)—borrowing heavily from Van Creveld (1991)—argues, “there are no fronts, no campaigns, no bases, no uniforms, no publicly displayed honors, no points d’appui, and no respect for the territorial limits of states.” These wars are often described as wars of national liberation or national unification and often have secession, irredentism, or decolonization as their objectives.

While the list of “new wars,” “postmodern wars,” “wars of the third kind,” and “peoples’ wars,” does not include every category of “new and distinct forms of war” promulgated in the recent literature, the studies reviewed here give one the sense of the type of categorization schemes being promoted to varying degrees. Interestingly, after discussing the need for new categories of war, most of the authors fail to delineate the cases that fall under the rubric of the respective “new war.” For example, Rice discusses several potential “wars of the third kind” in a list that is clearly not meant to be exhaustive. Kaldor primarily focuses on the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina rather than providing a clear delineation of the cases of “new wars,” and Gray does not furnish a list of postmodern wars at all. Only Holsti provides a list of all the candidate “peoples’ wars.” Nevertheless, these authors maintain that with the advent of these new wars, the nature of warfare has changed fundamentally, leaving scholars without a useful theoretical explanation to account for this new phenomenon. For these theorists, it is not simply the “newness” of the wars that make them so problematic, but the resulting lack of an explanation to account for them that makes them potentially so intractable.

For example, Holsti (p. 25) claims that the “trends and patterns” of warfare since 1945 “cannot be explained by the standard theoretical devices of international politics, particularly by neo-realist analysis.” Similarly, although Rice (1998) is concerned with the need to adapt U.S. strategy to adequately respond to “wars of the third kind,” the clear implication of his argument is that these wars are appreciably different from those usually addressed in previous studies of war. Gray (1997) is less concerned with strategy than Rice, but he is even more emphatic that “postmodern wars” are distinct from other types of war and he insists that “continuing illusions about the nature of war itself bedevil any attempts to bring it under control” (p. 23). Kaldor’s (1999) view also resembles those of other “new war” scholars with respect to the inability of extant models of international conflict to explicate her “new wars.” She suggests a need for “a new type of analysis” of war because of the “deficiencies of inherited ways of perceiving . . . war” (p. 32).

To be sure, each of these theorists is correct that the phenomenon of war in the post-World War II era has changed with respect to the locus of war and the prevalence of intrastate over interstate war; however, we take issue with their assertion that the armed conflicts on which they focus constitute new and distinct forms of war. We also disagree with their assumption that these “new wars” are inexplicable
using extant approaches in world politics. In the next section, we provide support for these contentions.

**ARE NEW WARS EXPLICABLE USING EXTANT THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN WORLD POLITICS?**

Holsti (1996) maintains that the neorealist emphasis on systemic rather than state-level variables in accounting for the etiology of war is not applicable to “peoples’ wars.” He is emphatic that “there is little remaining in the traditional literatures of security studies specifically and international politics more generally that has analytical value for understanding or explaining the persistence” of these wars (pp. 206–207). According to him, this is largely due to the fact that these wars do not arise from system-level variables but from factors internal to Third World states. Holsti is correct that many postcolonial armed conflicts seem to emerge from internal rather than external factors (Ayoob, 1995; Luard, 1989; Henderson & Singer, 2000) and that theoretical arguments in the international relations (IR) literature that focus largely on the interaction between states may offer little by way of explanation of wars that originate within states. However, this critique is rather self serving since neorealists—and realists, more generally—self-consciously focus their analyses on the explanation of international phenomena; therefore, it is neither surprising nor inconsistent that their approach(es) would not be as useful in accounting for processes or outcomes that are primarily domestic in nature. Nevertheless, even realist models, such as power parity, and idealist thesis, such as the democratic peace proposition, have been systematically—and arguably, successfully—applied to domestic conflicts (see Benson & Kugler, 1998; Hegre et al., 1997). Moreover, Snow (1999, pp. 105–106) argues that civil wars during the Cold War era were readily explained using realist precepts. So even on this point, Holsti’s “new war” thesis is overstated at best.

Although we share the critique of the ethical, empirical, and epistemological myopia of a fair share of Eurocentric scholarship in world politics in general (e.g. see Henderson, 1995; Singer, 1996), actually the more appropriate target for this aspect of Holsti’s critique is the comparative politics literature. While world politics may have little to say about intrastate wars, these conflicts fall squarely in the purview of comparative politics, which has had much to say about them; therefore, critiques of studies of such wars should address the comparative politics research on the subject. But, neither Holsti, Kaldor, Gray, nor Rice challenges this literature; instead, Holsti culls his theoretical argument on the etiology of “peoples’ wars” from the comparative politics literature. In fact, the explanation of “peoples’ wars” that he proffers, which is quite consistent with those put forward by Kaldor, Gray, and Rice (see below), is a well-traveled explanation of civil war that focuses on conflict related to the simultaneous challenges of state building and nation building (see Cohen et al., 1981; Mullins, 1987; Henderson, 1999a). One implication of this apparent theoretical convergence among ostensibly different types of wars (i.e., “peoples’ wars” and civil wars in postcolonial regions) is that “peoples’ wars” are similar in etiology to these civil wars because that is largely what they are: civil wars in the Third World, rather than a new or distinct class of war (see below).

Similarly, Kaldor’s (1999) “new wars” seem to be largely coterminous with “low
intensity conflict (LIC),” which is actually an amalgam of various types of smaller scale interstate and intrastate armed conflict. She recognizes as much but cautions that “[a]lthough it is possible to trace the evolution of the new wars from the so-called low-intensity conflicts of the Cold War period, they have distinctive characteristics which are masked by what is in effect a catch-all term” (p. 2). She asserts that “new wars” largely reflect and have emerged in part from a “revolution in military affairs” (RMA); however, for her—and similarly for Gray (1997)—this RMA is not simply a revolution in the technology of warfare, which has generated new strategies and/or tactics of warfare, but “a revolution in the social relations of warfare” (p. 3). The centerpiece of this revolution has been the globalization of world politics evident in the greater interconnectedness of societies as a result of advanced information technologies and improvements in communications and data processing. This changed context has provided for the privatization of violence wherein “[t]he various political/military factions plunder the assets of ordinary people as well as the remnants of the state and cream off external assistance destined for the victims, in a way that is only possible in conditions of war or near war. In other words, war provides a legitimation for various criminal forms of private aggrandizement while at the same time these are necessary sources of revenue in order to sustain the war. The warring parties need more or less permanent conflict both to reproduce their positions of power and for access to resources” (p. 110).

Stripped of their lexical veneer, Kaldor’s “new wars” are not much different from the LICs from which she admits they derive. General John Galvin’s (1992, p. 60) conceptualization of low intensity conflict as “a kind of warfare we have known about since the beginning of human history, but we still tend to think of it as something new,” reminds us of the basic problem in Kaldor’s analysis. Galvin (p. 60) maintains that “[i]n the immediate future we will see the same causes of low-intensity conflict we have found in the past, including weak national administrations, lack of political infrastructure, economic stagnation, historic problems of disfranchisement for large parts of the citizenry, corruption and mismanagement, and difficult military–civil relationships.” This description appears to be almost identical to Kaldor’s; however, Galvin’s focus is on the terrorist, guerilla, and other intrastate and interstate armed conflicts that are evident throughout the last few hundred years and have been the mainstays of studies of war within comparative and world politics. These are not new wars at all.

In addition, the causes of Kaldor’s “new wars” are found in the same “weak state” structures that Rice (1988, p. 53) implicates in his “wars of the third kind” and that Holsti (1996, pp. 82, 130–143) implicates in his “peoples’ wars.” She is explicit that “[t]he new wars occur in situations in which state revenues decline because of the decline of the economy as well as the spread of criminality, corruption, and inefficiency, violence is increasingly privatized both as a result of growing organized crime and the emergence of paramilitary groups, and political legitimacy is disappearing” (p. 5). Her solution, “the reconstruction of legitimacy” (p. 114), dovetails with Holsti’s call for vertical and horizontal legitimacy within “strong state” structures as a deterrent to “peoples’ wars.” Kaldor also advocates “cosmopolitanism” or a “positive political vision, embracing tolerance, multiculturalism, civility and democracy,” as well as “a more legalist respect for certain overriding universal principles which
should guide political communities” to deter “new wars” (pp. 115–116). This is quite similar to Holsti’s call for democracy, stronger state structures, and regional development and integration initiatives as policies to deter “peoples’ wars.” It is quite interesting that “new wars,” “wars of the third kind,” and “peoples’ wars” all seem to call for the same type of solutions that many scholars—since Woodrow Wilson in this case—have called for to resolve the “old wars.” Therefore, while Holsti may be correct that neorealist arguments have great difficulty accounting for—and preventing—these “new wars,” it appears that Wilsonian idealist precepts are clearly relevant in explicating them.

Turning to Gray’s (1997) “postmodern wars,” these are largely a subset of Kaldor’s LICs that are marked by the increased salience of high-tech weaponry in their execution. In fact, Kaldor (1999, p. 2) admits that before settling on “new wars” as a label she considered the appellation “postmodern” to describe her newly discovered armed conflicts because, in one sense, she thought it might be “a more appropriate term.” Nevertheless, she was dissuaded because the “term [postmodern] is also used to refer to virtual wars and wars in cyberspace” while she stated that “the new wars involve elements of pre-modernity and modernity as well.” For Gray, however, the impact of technology on both our conception of war and our willingness and ability to wage war is a defining characteristic of his new type of war, “postmodern war.”

He argues that “postmodern war” largely results from the impact of “technoscience,” which “calls war into question (war will destroy the world) and simultaneously provides the rationales for continuing it (war can now be managed; war can be fought between bloodless machines)” (p. 247). Moreover, he suggests that “[p]ostmodern war exists because it has managed to deploy a specific and limited definition of rationality and science as an institution to replace valor . . . The values are those of lethality . . . and low casualties for ‘our side’” (pp. 247–248). In addition, he maintains that “[h]igh-tech weapons, especially nuclear weapons, have also shifted the discourse of war in some crucial ways—freezing out world war and total industrial war, except in the budgets and imaginations of the armies of the world, and fostering dreams of painless ‘surgical’ LICs” (p. 247). According to him, “postmodern war is now framed through computer metaphors and weapons as a manageable contest of intelligent machines in cyberspace, making it a much less horrible prospect. So, in spite of the invention and the use of the most incredible inhuman weapons, the danger and reality of horrible wars remains at the same extraordinary level that it has since 1939” (p. 252).

A closer look at Gray’s (1997) prescription for the prevention of “postmodern wars” reveals that—beyond the “postmodernist” verbiage—it is really little different from the prescriptions offered in a more straightforward way by Holsti, Kaldor, and Rice. For example, Gray (1997) calls for more open and transparent decision making to check the “technophilia” that makes palatable the awful destructive capacity of modern high-tech weapons by depersonalizing war (i.e., the “cyborgization” of war). For him, the prevention of “postmodern wars” requires the “deconstruction” of our concepts of war through the empowerment of “subjugated knowledges,” which can then be used to construct “regimes of truths” that will provide the basis for a new—and hopefully, more humane—discourse on war (p. 256). Some may argue that these types of “solutions” provide the best evidence for why postmodernist ap-
proaches are best left to interpretations of the subtext of pieces of literature rather than applied to the substantive requirements for peace in our constructed, though nonetheless, very violent world. The relevance of “postmodern” world politics, notwithstanding, such a dismissive view misses the point that Gray’s (1997) prescription for preventing “postmodern wars” is largely a call for the same type of political legitimacy that Kaldor, Rice, and Holsti demand.

To be sure, Gray emphasizes the more subjective elements of the legitimacy construct instead of focusing on the state structures necessary to insure political legitimacy, which would, in turn, recognize the “subjugated knowledges” that should shape the discourse on war (and peace) and inform policy. These “subjugated knowledges”—and their relationship to changes in technology—have been referenced quite readily (though communicated much differently) since the writings of Karl Marx, Karl Mannheim, W. E. B. DuBois, and Anna J. Cooper, among many others. What is distinctive in the present era, for Gray, is not the existence of “subjugated knowledges” or their relationship to the dominant paradigms and practices of politico-military elites, but the extent of the destructiveness of present technology as well as the degree of detachment from war that such technology affords its user. Therefore, in the present era, “technophilia,”—unobstructed by the “subjugated knowledges” that can provide a counter to militaristic pursuits—risks the destruction of humankind. Nevertheless, the open discourses required for the postmodernist engagement that Gray favors requires open and legitimate political systems because he realizes that “[p]ostmodern war is first of all, and last of all, a political issue” (p. 251). It follows, then, that similar types of legitimate state structures that Kaldor, Rice, and Holsti insist deter their “new and distinct” wars also prevent Gray’s “postmodern wars”—again, indicating that “new wars” are clearly not inexplicable through extant approaches in world politics, but explanations of their etiology and prevention are quite consistent with Wilsonian idealist precepts.

Our review of the theoretical arguments on the factors that give rise to—and prevent—the putative “new wars” lead us to the conclusion that these wars are little different in etiology from those that comprise the locus of armed conflicts captured in extant categories of war. Further, we contend that the “newness” of these wars largely derives from the fact that they are a hodgepodge of several types of war (i.e. interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars) whose distinctiveness as a category derives from the diverse morphologies of its constituent wars rather than its novelty as a “new and distinct” form of war. After creating this typological hodge-podge, “new war” theorists exclaim that IR theory can not account for the “new wars.”

It is important to demonstrate that our concerns with these new categories of war does not derive from any “academic imperialism” on our part aimed at stifling the promulgation of new typologies. Instead, our concerns derive from a serious consideration of the claims of these authors in light of what for them appears to be a “fundamental” change in warfare. Therefore, in the next section, we’ll use the criteria of the “new war” theorists themselves to show how warfare has not changed “fundamentally.” Specifically, we’ll utilize the criteria provided by Holsti, who is the most systematic of the “new war” theorists, to determine the extent to which war has changed fundamentally. Also, it’s necessary to focus on Holsti’s analysis because it is the most theoretically developed and detailed examination of the “new wars” pro-
vided by the authors examined in this study. In this way, we are less likely to be viewed as using our own selective criteria to reject a thesis that we apparently disagree with.

**HAS WAR CHANGED “FUNDAMENTALLY”?**

Holsti (1996) maintains that “peoples’ wars” are different from conventional or total wars with respect to the types of participants, their patterns of prosecution, and their purpose(s). He makes it clear that “when two or more of these criteria change fundamentally, we can say that there has been a transformation of war” (p. 27). Since he asserts that his peoples’ wars evince such changed characteristics, one may infer that these wars constitute a new form of war, although Holsti does not use the term “new war” explicitly. Using Holsti’s criteria, let’s examine the extent to which war has changed “fundamentally.”

*Have the Types of Participants in Wars Changed?*

As noted above, many of the ostensible “peoples’ wars” that Holsti focuses on are primarily—though not exclusively—civil wars that have occurred in Third World states. Holsti’s view that the types of participants in wars have changed ignores the fact that today, as in the past, civil wars are fought by the armed forces of states and those of insurgents ranging from amorphous dissident groups to highly organized militias and rebel armies. Moreover, he adds that “peoples’ wars” are characterized by a blurring of the historic distinction between the soldier/combatant and the civilian/noncombatant, creating “a fundamentally different nexus between combatants and civilians” as compared to earlier wars (p. 39). Military historian Geoffrey Parker (1995, p. 369) agrees that “[i]n the wars fought in Europe during the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries between 70 and 80 per cent of the casualties were military. By contrast, since 1945, the majority of the approximately fifty million people killed in war have been civilians—rising to 70 per cent in Vietnam.” The operative phrase in Parker’s statement is “wars fought in Europe.” When we examine the ratio of civilian to military deaths in the imperialist wars of the nineteenth century fought outside of Europe we find patterns of high civilian-to-military casualty rates that Holsti would have us believe are exclusive to these very recent “wars of the third kind.”

For example, Karnow (1989, p. 194) notes that in the Second Philippines War of 1899-1902—one of the United States’ imperialist wars—4,000 U.S. troops were killed, 20,000 *insurrectos*, and roughly 200,000 civilians. This almost 10 to 1 ratio of civilian to military deaths in this “old war”—with civilian deaths representing 89% of the total—surpasses that of even the prototypical “peoples’ war,” the Vietnam War. Moreover, there is the long history of armed conflicts fought to secure Africans for Euro-American enslavement, as well as the colonial wars in Africa and Asia, which routinely targeted civilians. The absence of focus on these conflicts reflects an underlying problem in Holsti’s formulation, which is its Eurocentric orientation, wherein changes in warfare in Europe are taken as representing changes in warfare in general. For instance, in his discussion of the transformation to total war, he points out
that “eighteenth- and twentieth-century European wars share little in common” (p. 35) and he uses this as a basis for his claim that warfare changed “fundamentally” across these eras. Although he briefly mentions the distinction between European practices on the continent and those away from it (e.g., p. 34), he largely ignores the evolution of warfare in other areas, which is ironic since he often claims that the problem with many theorists is their “Eurocentric” focus (e.g., see Holsti, 1992). In sum, even a cursory review of the full range of international and domestic wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—to include imperialist wars—cautions against accepting Holsti’s conclusions that his “new wars” evince higher civilian to military fatality rates than the “old wars.”

**Have the Patterns of Prosecution of Wars Changed?**

Holsti maintains that the patterns of prosecution of the “new wars” are dramatically different from those of previous wars, with “peoples’ wars” marked by the use of guerilla warfare strategies rather than the more conventional strategies of earlier eras (p. 38). But Holsti’s view that guerilla warfare is a hallmark of his “new” wars ignores the prevalence of this type of warfare in the “old” wars. Parker (1995) observes that guerilla warfare has been employed in many of the “old wars,” such as the U.S. War of Independence, the Napoleonic Wars, the U.S. Civil War, the Franco-Prussian War, the Boer War, and World War II. Moreover, even a single war is often prosecuted using a combination of strategies and tactics. For example, the battles of the Napoleonic Wars were not only typified by the set-piece encounters such as occurred at Austerlitz, but also by the guerilla engagements in the Peninsula War (it is from this conflict that we get the term “guerilla war”). In addition, the U.S. War of Independence was fought not only in conventional battles, but also by the guerilla forces of Francis Marion (the “Swamp Fox”) and Nathaniel Greene. So much is Francis Marion associated with guerilla warfare that the *US Army Ranger Handbook* records him as one of the forerunners of the Rangers—who are experts in unconventional warfare. Of General Greene, Parker (1995, p. 190) states that he “combined regular forces with guerilla bands to exhaust and defeat an enemy in a way that foreshadowed the tactics of twentieth-century wars of national liberation…[o]ne hundred years later Mao Tse Tung echoed Greene’s tactics.”

In fact, “wars of the third kind,” which are often viewed as guerilla wars, often involve conventional strategies as well, making it difficult to simply label them as “guerilla wars” and to argue on that basis that they are “fundamentally” different from “conventional” or “institutionalized” wars. For example, Mao’s “people’s war” strategy is not simply a “guerilla warfare” strategy but one that proceeds through several stages, culminating in a three-stage protracted war strategy that emphasizes hit-and-run guerilla attacks, assaults by larger mobile columns utilizing a maneuver strategy, and finally set-piece conventional offensives. In practice, both Mao and Ho Chi Minh modified this approach and viewed guerillas as essential throughout the protracted war stage; nevertheless, it should be clear that “people’s war” is not synonymous with “guerilla war.” Lomperis (1996, p. 331) notes that leading North Vietnamese military strategists, particularly General Giap and Party Secretary Le Duan, “professed their deep loyalties throughout their careers” to a strategy of people’s
war; however, he insists that “[i]t is not . . . the strategy that they used to gain their victory.” He adds that the North Vietnamese had abandoned a people’s war approach shortly after the Tet Offensive of 1968 and there followed a period of searching for an alternative strategy. They used a conventional strategy in the failed Easter Offensive of 1972 and also used a conventional strategy in the successful Ho Chi Minh campaign of 1975 that felled Saigon. In Africa, one of the most protracted and destructive “peoples’ wars” has occurred in Angola; nevertheless, Arnold (1995, p. 375) reminds us that the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988 was “one of the largest conventional military clashes in Africa” [emphasis added].

Holsti (1996) also argues that the transformation in the prosecution of warfare has led to the increased lethality of “peoples’ wars.” For example, he states that “[c]asualty figures are a grim indicator of the transformation of armed conflict represented by wars of the “third kind” (p. 37). However, the apparent increased trend in the frequency, magnitude, or intensity of civil war over the last two centuries—ostensibly culminating in the more destructive peoples’ wars of the post World War II era—is largely the product of the increase in the number of states over the past two centuries (from 23 in 1816 to 155 in 1980). When the system is normalized to account for the number of states, we find that there is an absence of a trend in either the frequency, magnitude, or intensity of civil wars from 1816–1980 (Small and Singer, 1980, Chapter 16). These findings are hardly surprising when we remember that some of the most severe civil wars in the last two centuries were the “old wars” of the nineteenth century; in fact, the 20,000,000 battle deaths in the Tai’ping Rebellion of 1860–1864 have never been even remotely approached by the “peoples’ wars” of the post-World War II era. Therefore, Holsti’s view that civil wars in the post-World War II era have been more frequent and more severe as compared to those occurring in other eras appears to be incorrect. The degree to which the patterns of prosecution of the “new wars” are dramatically different from previous wars is an empirical issue that should be systematically demonstrated before one claims that wars have changed “fundamentally.” Holsti does not provide such a demonstration, relying instead on anecdote, allusion, and a liberal ransacking of history, to make a case that is easily challenged and clearly requires much more systematic and reliable evidence.7

Has the Purpose(s) of War Changed?

The final factor that Holsti discusses to show how war has changed fundamentally focuses on the “purpose” of war. He maintains that the “purpose” of war is different in “peoples’ wars” than in other types of war. Holsti’s argument presumes that determining the purpose of war is not problematic and that we have a clear understanding of the purpose of “old wars” that allows us to differentiate them from the “new wars.” This is hardly apparent. In fact, one of the great difficulties faced by analysts of war is uncovering the “purpose” of war. For example, what was the “purpose” of the protagonists in World War I or World War II, or the Vietnam War? Was there only a single purpose, or several? Moreover, whose “purpose” defines “the purpose” of each respective war? Even if we conceive of purpose in terms of strategic objectives, what is clear from even a cursory review of the history of warfare in the last century is that objectives change and often there are as many distinct
“objectives” in a war as there are participants (and often the participants themselves are in dispute with decision makers on their own side as to what they are fighting for—even more so when wars are fought, as they often are, by coalitions). Although Holsti (1991) has devoted some effort to determining the “purpose” of wars, his analysis is highly idiosyncratic and impressionistic and relies far too much on his personal judgment as to which factor(s) defined the “purpose” of each respective war. For example, Holsti’s (1991) cases from 1648–1991 range from wars with a single “purpose” (e.g., the Second Balkan War) to those with as many as seven (e.g., the Anschluss). Further, his lists include only the “issues for original combatants” while ignoring the issues motivating third parties to become involved in the conflicts; strangely, in some cases, he only includes the “purpose” of one side in the conflict as the “purpose” of the war (see Tables 3.1, 5.1, 7.1, 9.1, and 11.1). In fact, there is little more than Holsti’s reading of history to inform his evaluation of the “purpose(s)” of war and it is these impressionistic and idiosyncratic suppositions that he relies on to base his subsequent claims that war has changed “fundamentally.” When devising a typology, one is better served by utilizing criteria that allow one to differentiate among the actors while leaving the objectives of the actors in the conflict as an empirical issue to be uncovered through systematic analyses rather than being embedded in the classificatory scheme itself.

For example, Vasquez (1993) argues that wars between states of very asymmetrical capabilities are driven by a different decision-making logic than those of states that are relatively balanced in terms of their capabilities. He bases his typology of war, in part, on this characteristic whereby wars involving states of asymmetrical capabilities (i.e., wars of inequality) are differentiated from those in which the belligerents are of approximate parity (i.e., wars of rivalry). This typology does not fall prey to the deficiencies of that proposed by Holsti. In a more widely used classificatory scheme, the Correlates of War (COW) project’s typology of war is based on the politico-legal characteristics of the participants involved (i.e., states or non-state actors) rather than their military, economic, or demographic characteristics. In the COW approach, one can use the compiled data to determine the military, economic, and demographic correlates of wars that the political entities engage in, without assuming, a priori, that differences or similarities with respect to any of these characteristics define the type of conflict. Moreover, it does not pretend to capture the “purpose” of the wars, but leaves that to analysts who utilize these data. It is this approach that has allowed the COW typology to become the most widely utilized classificatory scheme in the scientific study of war and peace and that has made the resultant COW data set, “the most thorough and influential quantitative data set on war” (Vasquez, 1993, p. 25).

In sum, Holsti’s suggestion that war has changed “fundamentally” does not hold up to close scrutiny even using his own criteria of what constitutes such change. Having argued that the “new wars” are not appreciably different from the “old wars” in terms of their participants, prosecution, and “purpose,” we turn our focus to providing support for our claim that “new wars” are simply a hodgepodge of the “old wars.” By disaggregating the different types of war obscured under the respective “new war” rubrics, we should be able to further demonstrate the extent to which the “new wars” are simply the “old wars” with different names. Since Holsti (1996) is
the only “new war” study to provide a detailed list of candidate wars, it is necessary to focus on his study in our attempt to demonstrate that the “new wars” are basically the “old wars,” after all.

**DISTINGUISHING WARS AND THEIR CORRELATES: INTERSTATE AND EXTRASTATE WARS**

*Types of War: The COW Project Categories*

Interstate wars are the most studied form of international conflict in world politics and they are most often defined, operationally, following COW criteria as sustained combat between the regular armed forces of at least two recognized states wherein the participants incur at least 1,000 battle deaths (Small and Singer, 1982). COW also provides a straightforward definition of extrastate wars as armed conflicts between states and nonstate political entities that incur 1,000 battle deaths a year, including both imperial and colonial wars. Lastly, intrastate wars include both intercommunal and civil wars. Whereas an intercommunal war is fought between two groups within the state (neither party being the government), a civil war is defined as sustained military combat, resulting in at least 1,000 deaths per year, pitting central government forces against an insurgent force capable of effective resistance, determined by the latter’s ability to inflict upon the government forces at least 5% of the fatalities that the insurgents sustain (Small and Singer, 1982, pp. 210–220). While both interstate and extrastate wars are international wars, intercommunal and civil wars are primarily domestic wars (with the exception of a special class of civil wars that are joined by third party states, internationalized civil wars).

**Comparing “New Wars” and “Old Wars”**

As noted above, Holsti’s (1996) analysis—like those of other “new war” theorists—conflates several distinct types of war under a single rubric. From what we can gather, Holsti’s (1996, pp. 26, 40) impressionistic codings and his narrative indicates that—at minimum—the vast majority of the armed conflicts listed in the Appendix to his volume are “peoples’ wars”; however, a review of these “major armed conflicts” reveals that most of them are the interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars outlined in the COW project. For example, the 177 armed conflicts from the end of World War II to 1992 in Holsti’s (1996) list of “peoples’ wars” includes 21 of the 23 COW interstate wars (it does not include the Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition or the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1985–87), all 24 COW extrastate wars, and 71 of the 77 COW civil wars (it does not include the civil wars in Paraguay, 1947; Yemen Arab Republic, 1948; Indonesia, 1953; Argentina, 1955; Algeria, 1962; and Romania, 1989). That is, approximately 66% of Holsti’s (1996) “peoples’ wars” from the end of World War II to 1992 (COW war data end in 1992) are the interstate, extrastate, and civil wars that are common to studies of armed conflict in world politics. Of the 75 remaining armed conflicts—the totals seem inconsistent because in 18 cases Holsti (1996) observes a single armed conflict while COW records at least two (in the case of Holsti’s coding of the armed conflict in Guatemala (1966–94), COW records three
separate wars) and there are several cases where COW codes a single war while Holsti codes several wars—these consist of interstate and extrastate conflicts that do not attain the COW battle death threshold (e.g., the U.S. armed intervention of Grenada in 1983) and domestic armed conflicts that do not attain the COW battle death threshold or the criteria for effective resistance (e.g., the ongoing conflict in Egypt involving armed religious factions and the government). Holsti codes 28 of the remaining conflicts as “irredentist or secessionist” and these are largely convergent with the large-scale “ethnopolitical conflicts” found in the Minorities at Risk (MAR) project. Combining these conflicts with those found in the COW lists, the result is that 144 of the 177 armed conflicts in Holsti’s analysis—more than 80% of the total—consists of extant types of international conflict. The remaining conflicts are primarily the LICs and the smaller scale “ethnopolitical conflicts,” such as those found in Gurr’s (1994) research (e.g., the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland).

So from where does one derive the “newness” of Holsti’s “peoples’ wars?” Clearly the COW wars, constituting as they do the “old wars” that “new war” theorists disavow, cannot form the basis of the “new wars”; however, neither can Gurr’s “ethnopolitical conflicts” since he maintains that these are not “new wars” at all. In fact, according to Gurr (1994), these conflicts have been occurring throughout the post-World War II era—and likely, much earlier. One may assert that the “newness” of “peoples’ wars” derives from the characteristics of the remaining armed conflicts in Holsti’s (1996) study after we delete both the COW project wars and Gurr’s “ethnopolitical conflicts” from Holsti’s (1996) list—i.e., the LICs. However, Holsti (1996, pp. 37–40) acknowledges that his “peoples’ wars” or “wars of the third kind” are extremely brutal and generate high numbers of casualties. For instance, he states that “[c]asualty figures are a grim indicator of the transformation of armed conflict represented by wars of the ‘third kind’” (p. 37). It follows that, to a large degree, “peoples’ wars” must consist of the interstate, extrastate, and civil wars delineated in COW, which are larger in scale due to the battle death criterion in the COW classification schema, and the large-scale intercommunal conflicts found in Gurr (1994) (at present, COW does not provide a list of intercommunal wars) and not the LICs that remain on Holsti’s list of “armed conflicts” after the aforementioned wars are deleted. However, as noted above, the wars from COW and Gurr (1994) are hardly new at all. In fact, they form the locus of wars that Holsti and others use as a baseline from which to differentiate their “new wars.” It is clear that while Holsti (1996) declares that his “new wars” are distinct from “old” wars, he includes these “old wars” in his list of “new wars.” This makes it exceedingly difficult to argue that “peoples’ wars” are “new and distinct” forms of war.

An alternative path for salvaging Holsti’s claims is the argument that the wars on his list are somehow different in their correlates and etiologies from those on the COW list. Since “peoples’ wars” consist of interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars, one would have to show that the correlates of each class of wars are different from those of their counterparts among “peoples’ wars.” That is, if one is to suggest that “peoples’ wars” (and by implication, “new wars,” in general) are “new and distinct” forms of war, then one would need to demonstrate that the interstate wars within the “peoples’ war” category have different correlates than interstate wars as defined by COW, and that extrastate wars within the ‘peoples’ wars’ category have different
correlates than extrastate wars as defined by COW, and that intrastate wars within the “peoples’ wars” category have different correlates than intrastate wars as defined by COW. On the other hand, the failure to distinguish the correlates of “peoples’ wars” from those of extant types of war would tend to support the view that “peoples’ wars” are an amalgam of these other types of wars and do not represent a “new” category of war requiring a “new” theoretical or analytical approach for their explanation.

However, this research design path is not open to Holst i because roughly 66% of his “peoples’ wars” are the identical wars found in COW and more than 80% are those found in the combination of COW and the MAR datasets; therefore, the likelihood that the corresponding interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars found among these lists will have different correlates is exceedingly low. To be sure, the correlates of the “peoples’ wars” that are included among the COW interstate wars appear to be quite compatible with the robust findings of prominent studies of interstate war in world politics. For example, none of the interstate “peoples’ wars” violated the democratic peace proposition. Where there are likely to be differences in the correlates of “peoples’ wars” and those of extant categories of wars are in those LICs that are included in Holst i’s list (what COW classifies as militarized interstate disputes); however, for reasons stated above, the LICs cannot be used to constitute the core of the “peoples’ wars” category.

Moreover, there is a bigger problem with Holst i’s (1996) analysis in that by combining several categories of war under a single rubric he has made the additional assumption that they have a common etiology (as evidenced by his theoretical argument on the causes of “peoples’ wars,” see below) and, therefore, they have common correlates. The point here is not that Holst i asserts that interstate wars on the COW list share similar correlates with those on the “peoples’ war” list, but that Holst i implies that the interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars that he includes in his “peoples’ war” category—as a group—share common correlates. It stands to reason that the major justification for including these diverse types of war under a single rubric is the assumption that they share common correlates and etiologies—i.e., Holst i’s alleged common “purpose” for these wars as compared to earlier wars; however, Holst i fails to empirically evaluate this seemingly clear implication of his “peoples’ war” thesis. Beginning with the two types of international wars (i.e., interstate and extrastate wars), let us examine the extent to which they share common correlates and, therefore, justify Holst i’s inclusion of them in a single category of war.

**Interstate and Extrastate Wars**

Although there is a dearth of systematic research on the correlates of extrastate war, a recent analysis of the factors associated with the onset of interstate and extrastate war from 1946–1992 reveals several similarities between these two classes of war (Henderson, 2002). For example, greater economic development (controlling for major power status) is generally associated with a decreased likelihood of a state’s involvement in both interstate and extrastate wars in the post-World War II era. Similarly, political transitions do not appear to be significantly associated with either
interstate or extrastate wars. In addition, during the post-World War II era, major powers were more likely to be involved in both interstate and extrastate wars. The latter finding indicates, inter alia, that while the major powers enjoyed a “Long Peace” among themselves where they were less likely to fight each other (especially after the Korean War), they were hardly opposed to fighting nonmajor powers. In addition, since extrastate wars have been primarily imperial or colonial armed conflicts, it is not surprising that the major powers as a group were more likely to be involved in these types of wars during the “Long Peace.”

While these findings suggest several similarities between interstate and extrastate wars, there are even more striking dissimilarities between them. For example, Western states were no more or less likely to be involved in interstate wars in the post-World War II period, but they were significantly more likely to be involved in extrastate wars. In fact, Western states fought the lion’s share of the most protracted and destructive extrastate wars (e.g., Indo-Chinese War, Malayan Rebellion, Algerian War, Angolan War, Mozambican War, Guinea/Bissau War). Another major difference between the correlates of interstate and extrastate wars is that while democratic states (again, controlling for major power status) were more likely to be involved in interstate war from 1946–1992, democracies were less likely to be involved in extrastate war. Moreover, while Western democracies were less likely to become involved in interstate war, they were significantly more likely to be involved in extrastate wars.

The divergent relationships among the correlates of interstate and extrastate wars in the post-World War II period in some ways may reflect the differences that Vasquez (1993) associates with respect to the motivations behind “wars of rivalry” and “wars of inequality.” More directly, extrastate wars are often fought by protagonists, who insist that a given territory (or people) should be incorporated into their state (or empire), and their adversaries, who are often asserting a right to self-determination and/or independence. Therefore, the logic of decision making in extrastate wars may be more similar to that found in secessionist-oriented civil wars than the realpolitik logic that is assumed to guide decision making in interstate wars. To be sure, in the post-World War II era a very diverse group of imperialist powers usually made very similar claims with regard to their “right” to their occupied or colonial territories and they were willing to go to war to press these claims, as evidenced by the French in Vietnam and Algeria; the British in Malaya and Kenya; the Portuguese in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola; the Chinese in Tibet; and the Ethiopians in Eritrea. We are not claiming that extrastate wars are caused by the same factors that generate civil wars, but we are pointing out that in some ways the decision-making logic used in extrastate wars is similar to that which is assumed to prevail in civil wars as opposed to that which is assumed to prevail in interstate wars. Regardless, the crux of the matter is that the different correlates of interstate and extrastate wars militate against subsuming them under a single rubric.

The differences in the correlates of interstate and extrastate wars probably reflect larger differences in the etiologies of these two types of armed conflict and further reinforces our view that “new war” theorists should not include these diverse types of wars under a single rubric and then suggest that they represent a single, “new and distinct” form of war. However, “new war” theorists do not simply combine interstate and extrastate wars—which have different correlates—under a single rubric,
they also combine these two distinct forms of war with civil and intercommunal wars, which have even more distinct correlates and etiologies. In the next section, we discuss several problems associated with conflating civil wars and other types of domestic armed conflict and review the implications for the arguments of “new war” theorists.

**DISTINGUISHING WARS AND THEIR CORRELATES: CIVIL WARS**

Scholars have drawn clear distinctions between the correlates of civil wars and other forms of domestic conflicts. The difference in correlates is not surprising since a civil war is distinct from other forms of domestic conflict in terms of the scale and the objectives, the degree of coordination required for successful prosecution, and the more protracted nature and level of destructiveness of civil war. Gurr (1970, p. 334) encouraged scholars to distinguish among several forms of domestic violence, and this view has been largely supported by the consistent findings that the correlates of domestic conflict vary across different types (Boswell and Dixon, 1990; Gurr and Duvall, 1973; Hardy, 1979). For example, the presence of a democratic regime is associated with an increased likelihood of protests but a decreased likelihood of rebellions (Gurr and Lichbach, 1979). Similarly, while economic development reduces the likelihood of civil wars (Henderson and Singer, 2000) it appears to increase the likelihood of lesser forms of domestic conflict such as protests, demonstrations, strikes, etc. (Eichenberg et al., 1984; Gurr and Duvall, 1973). Nevertheless, “new war” theorists conflate civil wars and smaller scale domestic conflicts (which have different correlates) with extrastate and interstate wars (which also appear to have different correlates) into their single amorphous catchall category of post-World War II armed conflict.

Importantly, civil wars comprise the largest number of any single class of armed conflict in the post-World War II era, and a large portion of those conflicts categorized as “peoples’ wars” (see Holsti 1996, pp. 210–224). Nonetheless, of the few large-n, longitudinal, data-based studies of civil wars, Henderson and Singer’s (2000) study, which focuses exclusively on civil wars in postcolonial states, includes many of Holsti’s “peoples’ wars.” The findings from this study may provide a baseline by which to compare these civil wars with “peoples’ wars” in order to determine the latter’s distinctiveness. The theoretical argument upon which they derive their empirical findings assumes that postcolonial civil wars emerge largely from the failure of states to respond effectively to the simultaneous challenges of state building and nation building. As noted above, this is an enduring argument in comparative politics and is the same argument put forth by Holsti to account for the etiology of “peoples’ wars” and is generally consistent with Kaldor’s and Rice’s arguments on the factors that give rise to “new wars” and “wars of the third kind,” respectively.

The thesis suggests that European states had many decades—for some, centuries—to develop effective institutions of governance and a domestic environment in which the central government was the primary institution to which citizens swore fealty. Moreover, among European states, nation building followed state building; therefore, European elites were able to address and resolve problems associated with each sequentially. In comparison, postcolonial states not only had a much shorter
time horizon in which to build effective state structures and cohesive national identities, but they usually had to accomplish both simultaneously. One result was that postcolonial political elites faced a dilemma wherein by attempting to create strong state institutions they generated domestic resistance that further reduced their ability to effectively govern, since traditional leaders of the heterogeneous groups within these societies customarily are not possessed of an overarching national identity that recognizes the legitimacy of the central government, nor are they usually intent on helping to establish institutions of governance that challenge their own traditional authority. In addition, although leaders of postcolonial states risk the disintegration of their societies, they nonetheless have disincentives to providing institutional and infrastructural development out of fear that political development might lead to the political mobilization of disparate groups in their societies and the construction of rival power centers that might threaten their incumbency. Many of these elites, unable or unwilling to garner legitimacy from a disaffected, generally poor, usually heterogeneous, and often disgruntled citizenry, turn to repression in order to ensure the security of their individual regime while devoting resources to the military to stave off insurgency. The result for many postcolonial states is often the very insurgency that the governing elites’ policies were meant to deter.

The implication of Henderson and Singer’s (2000) findings for research on “peoples’ wars” is that if “peoples’ wars” consist largely of postcolonial civil wars and both emerge from the same process as suggested by the theoretical argument outlined above, then maybe they are largely the same phenomenon. In addition, since the theoretical argument on the etiology of “peoples’ wars” is identical to that used to explain postcolonial civil wars, then it is not surprising that IR “theories” are hardly applicable to these wars since—if the theoretical argument is correct—“peoples’ wars,” by and large, emerge from domestic rather than international factors.

All told—like the extrastate and interstate wars included under the “peoples’ war” rubric—the postcolonial civil wars included among the “peoples’ wars” do not constitute a new type of armed conflict with distinct correlates and etiologies. These civil wars are quite explicable using extant theoretical arguments found in the comparative politics literature, and IR scholars should simply wed their theoretical arguments on interstate phenomena with those pertinent to intrastate phenomena and not propose new categories when it appears that the domestic and international twain meet. Having made our case with respect to interstate, extrastate, and civil wars, the remaining portion of the large-scale armed conflicts in Holsti’s (1996) study consists primarily of intercommunal conflicts; we now turn our focus to the latter.

DISTINGUISHING WARS AND THEIR CORRELATES: INTERCOMMUNAL WARS

Just as with interstate, extrastate, and civil wars, it is important to compare both the theoretical arguments and the ostensible correlates of intercommunal wars with those of “peoples’ wars.” For the most part, intercommunal wars are often categorized as interethnic conflicts, and the theoretical arguments pertaining to them are both extensive and diverse (Horowitz, 1985; Henderson, 1999b). In addition, there is a lingering debate regarding the categorization of armed conflicts as “ethnic con-
flicts” as well as concern regarding the definition of interethnic or “ethnopolitical conflict,” itself. For example, many empirical analyses of ostensibly “ethnic” conflicts seem to assume, out of hand, the salience of cultural factors in these disputes (see Henderson, 1997, pp. 650–655). In addition, many of these analyses fail to differentiate between armed conflicts that involve government forces on one side (e.g., the Angolan Civil War) and those that do not (e.g., the intercommunal war in Somalia). Nevertheless, it is hoped that through an analysis of “interethnic conflicts,” which comprise at least a sizeable subset of intercommunal wars, we can glean an appreciation of the correlates of the larger set of intercommunal wars in order to determine their distinctiveness from “peoples’ wars.” We are limited to this alternative approach since there have been few, if any, large-n, data-based, systematic analyses that explicitly focus on intercommunal wars using the COW definition of intercommunal warfare.

Most of the systematic empirical findings on the correlates of intercommunal conflict focus on interethnic, or “ethnopolitical” conflict and draw on data from the Minorities at Risk (MAR) project. Gurr and Harff (1994, pp. 190) define ethnopolitical groups as “ethnic groups that have organized to promote their common interests,” and it is these groups that engage in “ethno-political conflict.” There are four types of ethno-political groups; among them, ethno-nationalists and communal contenders are most often associated with conflict (the other two groups are “ethnoclasses” and “indigenous peoples”). While many factors drive “ethnopolitical conflicts” (e.g., see Gurr and Moore, 1998), Gurr and Harff’s (1994) theoretical argument implicates discrimination, underdevelopment, and the absence of full-fledged democracy as key variables leading to ethnopolitical violence. The major empirical findings of Gurr’s (1994) analysis of large-scale “ethnopolitical conflicts” generally support this view. In addition, his findings suggest that issues of state building and nation building seem to be at the heart of these conflicts insofar as “contention for state power among communal groups in the immediate aftermath of state formation, revolution, and efforts to democratize autocratic regimes” are the main issues of the fifty most serious “ethnopolitical conflicts” in the MAR data set. This argument dovetails with Posen’s (1993, pp. 328) thesis that in situations where ethnic groups can not rely on the central government to provide protection, such as in regime transitions, an ethnic security dilemma develops and increases the likelihood of interethnic conflict. For both Posen (1993) and Gurr (1994), political transitions are strongly implicated in intercommunal conflict, and for Gurr, political transition is the major culprit in large-scale “ethnopolitical conflicts.”

Interestingly, it appears that political transitions play, at best, a reduced role (Hegre et al., 1997, p. 25), if any at all (Henderson and Singer, 2000) in civil wars. These competing findings remind us that important correlates of one type of domestic conflict (e.g., intercommunal conflict) may be less important in a different type of conflict (i.e., civil war). On the other hand, Gurr’s (1994) findings seem to implicate many of the factors that Holsti (1996) argues are important correlates of “peoples’ wars” such as regime type, political stability, and level of development; therefore, just as in the case of extrastate, interstate, and civil wars, previously discussed, it appears that the correlates of “peoples’ wars” are very similar to those of an extant (though admittedly imprecise) category of armed conflict, in this case, interethnic or
“ethnopolitical conflict.” Again, it does not appear that “peoples’ wars” represent a “new” form of war, but rather they are an amalgam of various types of war subsumed under a single rubric, which is evident once we tease out the particular types of conflict subsumed under the general category.

CONCLUSION

In sum, in this essay we have examined several arguments that suggest that there are “new” types of wars that are inexplicable in light of extant models and “theories” because their correlates and etiologies are so different from the “old” wars that have preoccupied world politics scholarship. While we concede that there are differences in warfare today with regard to its modal form (i.e., intrastate war as opposed to interstate war) and its predominant locus (i.e., outside of Europe as opposed to within Europe), we suspect that the “new wars” are readily conceptualized using extant war typologies. Further, we have demonstrated that once one disaggregates the diverse wars that are subsumed under the “new wars,” “postmodern wars,” “wars of the third kind,” and “peoples’ wars” rubrics, we find that their correlates and etiologies are quite similar to the extant class of war into which they are appropriately categorized.

Our analysis indicates that we should focus less on “novel” forms of war and instead renew our efforts to more fully account for the interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars that continue to rage across our planet. We also encourage our colleagues to turn their focus towards explicating the extrastate, civil, and intercommunal wars that have been severely under-studied (in a systematic sense) in world politics. It is hoped that such systematic research will allow us to better appreciate the factors that give rise to these often increasingly frequent wars which have plagued states over the last half-century, so that we can provide informed policies to reduce the likelihood of their occurrence in the new millennium.

As an aside, we are reminded that just as our analysis of the correlates and etiology of “new wars” draws our attention to the similarities and dissimilarities across different classes of war, the discussion also leads us to a consideration of the extent to which those similarities that do obtain suggest a theoretical convergence on the causes of war. This is partly owed to Holsti’s combining of extrastate, interstate, and intrastate wars under the “peoples’ war” rubric. Moreover, it derives from an appreciation that Holsti, in particular, and “new war” theorists, in general, proffer a single theoretical argument to account for what turns out as not a single category of conflict but what is, in fact, a diverse amalgam of extrastate, interstate, and intrastate wars. So in spite of the fact that Holsti’s analysis seems off the mark with respect to suggesting a new category of war and although his intent was to suggest greater diversity among classes of wars and theoretical explanations for their onset, it turns out that his analysis may contribute to the streamlining of theoretical explanations for war. That is, in providing an explanation for the onset of what he thought was a new type of war but what is actually an amalgam of various types of wars, Holsti may have inadvertently suggested a unified theory of war. However, in actuality, Holsti has not provided such a unified theory but an internally focused theoretical model, which due to its internal focus appears to account for postcolonial civil wars and some intercommunal conflicts; however, the state-building/nation-building model
seems to be less useful in explicating the interstate wars that have occurred in the post-World War II era.\footnote{Holsti (1996, p. 28) argues that “[s]ince 1648, war has been of three essentially different forms. We can call them ‘institutionalized war,’” “total war,” and wars of the third kind, sometimes called ‘peoples’ wars.”} Instead, since the interstate wars on the “peoples’ war” lists consist primarily of those from the COW population, then it is more likely that the correlates and etiologies of these wars are consistent with those uncovered by studies that focus on interstate war. That is, they are more readily explicated using extant models of interstate war such as the democratic peace thesis, power parity, or expected utility models rather than by Holsti’s intrastate war model.

Finally, we do not wish to appear dogmatic or peculiarly attached to a single typology of war. In fact, there is not a consensus with regard to the present categorization of armed conflict, and we hardly suggest that the COW typology is sacrosanct. Also, as stated above, we think that there is much that is useful in the analyses of Kaldor (1999), Gray (1997), Rice (1998), and Holsti (1996), and we encourage the generation of meaningful categories of armed conflict that allow us to more effectively analyze the correlates of war; however, as should be evident from the previous discussion, we do not think that such categories should reflect anything less than a rigorous and scientific engagement with the subject matter. Ignoring such a prescription, what is likely is the cumulation of categories of conflicts, rather than cumulation in the scientific sense, with little hope for generalizations regarding the correlates of war and even less hope for informed policy to prevent wars.

NOTES

1. Holsti (1996, p. 28) argues that “[s]ince 1648, war has been of three essentially different forms. We can call them “institutionalized war,” “total war,” and wars of the third kind, sometimes called “peoples’ wars.”

2. Holsti (p. 39), articulating a view that converges with Kaldor’s (1999) “new wars” and Gray’s (1997) “postmodern wars,” insists that “[f]or groups and communities, their main strength lies in the civil population; it is the main source of their manpower, logistical support, and intelligence. But civilians also become targets. Communities are often intermingled so that battle lines cut through cities, towns, and neighborhoods. To the extent that control over territory is a key value, civilian populations are the objects of eviction, rape, massacres, and ‘ethnic cleansing.’”

3. Beyond these, probably one of the more notable “new wars” is Huntington’s (1996) “fault-line wars,” which emerge from “clashes of civilizations.” But Huntington does not suggest a new category of conflict, he only suggests the increased importance of cultural factors (i.e., civilizations) in the conflicts in the post-Cold War era. For him, states remain the most important actors in world politics, and “fault-line wars” are either interstate or intrastate wars. His cultural analysis is an addendum to the realist state-centered approach (i.e., cultural realism) that does not reject the usefulness of extant typologies of armed conflict in explicating “fault line wars” (see Henderson and Tucker, 2001).

4. In fact, one would only expect to uncover generalizations among such a diverse array of armed conflicts if there were similar correlates of interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars, and, by implication, a unified theory of war—which is exactly what “new war theorists” seem to oppose.

5. “Peoples’ wars” are distinct in their targeting of civilians only if one ignores, inter alia, the record of strategic and terror bombing of population centers as in World War II, the targeting of civilians through blockades and unrestricted submarine warfare as in World War I, and similar targeting of civilian populations as in the Japanese invasion of Nanking and the Nazi genocide. In fairness to Holsti (1996), he does discuss the targeting of civilians in “total wars” of the twentieth century (e.g., p. 35); nevertheless, this observation does not prevent him from making claims that “the clear distinction between (sic) the state, the armed forces, and the society that is the hallmark of institutionalized war dissolves in ‘peoples war’” (p. 37). Also, his blanket claims such as “[w]ar in the twentieth century was total” ignores the more limited conflicts that mark the century as well, from the two Balkan Wars at the beginning of the century to the Falklands/Malvinas Islands War near the end.
6. See Lomperis (1996, pp. 13–20) for a discussion of several strategies of revolutionary insurgency that contain elements of guerilla warfare that are not “people’s wars” in the Marxist sense.
7. For a systematic analysis of the impact of different strategies on war outcomes, see Stam (1996).
8. For a systematic attempt to fuse state-building, intrastate war, and the interstate war, see Maoz (1989).

REFERENCES


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