

Theoretical Perspectives on the Ending of Wars

Cristopher Tuck

This paper examines some of the theoretical aspects of war termination.

As one commentator has noted: “It is always easier to get into a conflict than it is to get out of one.”¹ Wars often are much more difficult to end than they are to start. It seems self-evident, for example, that Germany by mid-1944 could no longer win the Second World War, yet it did not surrender until May 1945; the Korean war continued for three years even though the chance for either side of a clear-cut victory had ended within twelve months; as early as 2006, Coalition efforts in Afghanistan had begun to unravel, yet major US combat efforts continued until 2014. But why should ending wars be so problematic? Belligerents choose war because they believe that it will service their interests; as Clausewitz notes, therefore, once the costs for a belligerent of a war outweigh the value of objectives for which it is being fought, then rationally it should stop fighting and embrace peace.²

As this paper demonstrates, however, there are major structural impediments to the ending of wars that mean that armed conflicts often extend well beyond the point at which, with the benefit of hindsight, they should have stopped. At the heart of this paper is the idea that the termination of a war can be conceived of as “a political bargain struck between the belligerents to dispense with further combat.”³ Adversaries in a war each have a “bargaining space,” a concept which expresses for that political actor the span of peace agreements acceptable to them. Once the bargaining spaces of each side come to overlap with one another, then peace logically should follow.⁴ But the rational calculations surrounding this development are complicated by factors relating to four key questions: is war working; is there a peace to be made; is peace too costly; and can the war be stopped? This paper deals with each of these four questions in turn, before concluding with a fifth consideration - have the underlying issues been resolved?

Is war working?

In a sense, wars occur because adversaries misperceive their relative military power: they fight because each believes that it is they who will be strong enough to get what they want from an armed conflict, which may be victory, or occasionally a less punitive defeat. Often, it is only through actual fighting that both sides develop a more accurate picture of their real relative military power. War, then, should promote the development on both sides of a more

¹ William Flavin, “Planning for Conflict Termination and Post Conflict Success,” *Parameters* 33 (Autumn 2003): 95.

² Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 92.

³ Elisabeth Stanley, *Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination and the Korean War* (Stanfield, CA: Stanfield University Press, 2009), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*

accurate picture of the real balance of strength between them: their material strength, political commitment, and military expertise. Logically, wars should end when it becomes clear to both sides what the outcome of continuing to fight will be.⁵ Peace should come when both sides' expectations converge on which side is going to lose; or when both sides recognise that they are locked into what I. William Zartman terms a "mutually hurting stalemate," in which continuing the war benefits neither.⁶ In reality, however, this exchange of information between belligerents on who, if any, will triumph, is fraught with difficulties: in essence, terminating a war can be problematic because often it is not clear to a belligerent that war is failing to work as a tool of policy.

One problem is that the question "is war working?" necessarily is future-focused - it is expectations about outcomes that matter.⁷ The problem, of course, is that assessments of future performance in war cannot be verified.^{8,9} As the strategist Colin S. Gray notes, "The problem lies not so much with identifying trends, though that too can be contestable, but rather with divining the meaning of the trends that are caught in the net."¹⁰ This uncertainty opens up many opportunities for immobility in war termination positions. For a belligerent, the key question, from a war termination perspective, is whether their performance in war will improve. A belligerent that believes that it is doing well now, but that its circumstances will decline in the future, has every incentive to wish to end a war quickly. However, a belligerent that believes that it is doing less well now, but that thinks that circumstances will improve, is unlikely to want to terminate a war. This was very much the problem facing Coalition forces in Afghanistan in 2012-2014. With the departure of most of the Coalition forces planned in 2014, the Coalition had every incentive to want a political settlement. The Taliban, however, had little incentive to negotiate before 2014, given that their position would strengthen afterwards. Moreover, war may be subject to significant and unforeseen developments that can influence the outcome: the death, for example, in 1762 of the Czarina Elizabeth and the accession to the Russian throne of the pro-Prussian Czar Peter III that transformed the dismal prospects of Frederick the Great. For this reason, belligerents may persevere, as John Orme notes, because

⁵ Branislav L. Slantchev, "The Principle of Convergence in Wartime Negotiations," *The American Political Science Review*, 97, no. 5 (November 2003): 621; James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 379-414.

⁶ Dan Reiter, *How Wars End* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2-3; I. William Zartman, "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments," in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction*, eds. John Darby and Roger MacGinty (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 23.

⁷ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 55; Robert Harrison Wagner, "The Causes of Peace," in *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*, ed. Roy Licklider (New York University Press: New York, 1993), 246; Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 269; Roy Licklider, "Questions and Methods," in *Stopping the Killing*, ed. Licklider, 15; Paul R. Pillar, *Negotiating Peace: War Termination as a Bargaining Process* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1983), 242.

⁸ Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 234.

⁹ Smoke, *Controlling Escalation*, 270.

¹⁰ Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Thought for Defence Planners," *Survival*, 52, no. 3 (June-July 2010): 163.

they hope that “something will turn up”¹¹ and because, as history shows, “something does turn up from time to time.”¹² A belligerent may persevere with war even in adverse circumstances because they hope that a decisive development may transform circumstances in favourable ways.

The second problem concerns the metrics that one uses to measure one’s progress in war: by what criteria does one judge whether war is working? War is non-linear - one does not necessarily get more out of it by putting more in.¹³ Therefore, one cannot measure progress simply by measuring such inputs as money spent or troops deployed. Some obvious metrics might include relative casualty rates or ground taken. But, as the US’ war in Vietnam demonstrates, it can be possible to win the bulk of the tactical military engagements and still lose strategically. Even in conventional wars, short-term tactical and operational military successes may actually comprise the first steps towards strategic defeat, as Germany’s early successes against Russia in June and July 1941 demonstrate. In more complex unconventional scenarios traditional metrics are “largely meaningless” but the potential list of alternative metrics is huge and contested: should one focus on civilian casualties; insurgents killed; security force losses; “kinetic event density;” children in school; voter registration; polling of local populations or any number of other indicators?¹⁴

But there are other difficulties. One is that, to measure progress in a war, a belligerent needs to have a clear idea of what it is that it is fighting for. But states (and other political actors) often have goals that are undeclared, diffuse, poorly judged, transcendental and/or that change over the length of a conflict.¹⁵ It is possible, for example, to construe the objectives of a war in ways that make the process of defeat itself a form of victory. By 1918, for example, Field Marshal Hindenburg had reconstructed German objectives into an avoidance of surrender, because he judged that, in the long term, surrender would be more damaging to the German national essence than reaching a political settlement with the allies. He asserted that: “even if we should be beaten, we should not really be worse off than if we were to accept everything at present. The question must be asked: will the German people fight for their honor, not only in words but with deeds, to the last man and thereby assure themselves of the possibility of a new existence.”¹⁶

Another challenge is that, given the lack of objective information on which to base calculations on whether war is working, inevitably beliefs fill the gap: these beliefs are shaped

¹¹ John D. Orme, *The Paradox of Peace: Leaders, Decisions and Conflict Resolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 151.

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Colin S. Gray, *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory*, (US Army War College, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 14-17; Scott Sigmund Gartner, *Strategic Assessment in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1997), 8.

¹⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Missing Metrics of “Progress” in Afghanistan (and Pakistan)* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 14, 2007), 5, http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~rparis/Cordesman_paper.pdf <Accessed 26/7/2011>; *The Afghan-Pakistan War: A Status Report, 2009* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 18, 2009), 4-18; *Analyzing the Afghan-Pakistan War* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 July, 2008), 6.

¹⁵ See, for example, Robert Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006).

¹⁶ Fred Charles Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 101.

by individual and organisational biases.¹⁷ Formal and informal power structures, standard operating procedures, hierarchies of influence, and the wide variety of human cognitive biases can shape dramatically how decision-makers process evidence on the success of a given war.¹⁸ For example, individuals are often motivated by the desire to avoid cognitive dissonance, and so have a pre-disposition to shape new information to fit existing mindsets.¹⁹ Decision-making may be subject to “groupthink” in which information is ignored, or reinterpreted to fit in with a prevailing consensus.²⁰ Finally, calculations on whether war is working are shaped by the inescapable logic of the relational nature of war. War termination requires that both sides converge in their thinking on the prospective outcome of the conflict. But war is a dynamic contest against an opponent that thinks, reacts and adapts according to its own context. An opponent, for example, may judge the progress of a war according to completely different criteria leading to circumstances in which both may believe that victory is possible.²¹ Or an opponent may engage in responses that completely invalidate existing metrics for success: for example switching from a conventional military strategy to an unconventional one.²² Moreover, in the struggle to coerce an opponent into submission, an adversary has every incentive to exaggerate its commitment to fight, minimise its apparent losses, and avoid giving the impression that it is seeking an end to a war.²³ Thus, it may be difficult to know when a convergence in opinion between belligerents on the outcome of a war actually has been reached.²⁴

Convergence in expectations on the outcome of war is a pre-requisite for peace. But such a convergence may take a long time to emerge, depending upon the objectives one defines, the metrics one uses, the values through which one filters information, and the view one takes on future development. For belligerents at the outset of war, notes C. M. R. Mitchell, “Failure is seldom self-evident.”²⁵

¹⁷ Smoke, *Controlling Escalation*, 269; Branislav Slantchev, “How Initiators Win Their Wars: The Duration of Warfare and the Terms of Peace,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 48, no.4 (October 2004): 815.

¹⁸ Paul K. Davis, “Behavioural Factors in Terminating Superpower War,” in *Controlling and Ending Conflict: Issues Before and After the Cold War*, eds. Stephen J. Cimbala and Sidney R. Waldman (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 175; See also Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999).

¹⁹ Orme, *Paradox of Peace*, 11.

²⁰ Irving L. Janis *Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 35-47; Gartner, *Strategic Assessment*, 43.

²¹ Gartner, *Strategic Assessment*, 26; Pillar, *Negotiating Peace*, 59.

²² I. William Zartman, “Unfinished Agenda: Negotiating Internal Conflicts,” in *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*, ed. Roy Licklider, 25-27; Jane E. Holl, “When War Doesn’t Work: Understanding the Relationship Between the Battlefield and the Negotiating Table,” in *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*, ed. Roy Licklider, 279-280.

²³ H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment: The Causes of War Termination and the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29.

²⁴ Pillar, *Negotiating Peace*, 67-68; Michael Codner, *The Implications of War Termination Considerations for the Operational Commander*, Operations Department (Newport, RI: US Naval War College, March 1991), 5.

²⁵ Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 31; C. R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 174.

Is there a peace to be made?

The problem of ending wars is compounded by the fact that, even if a belligerent decides that war is no longer working as a means to achieve its objectives, creating an overlap in bargaining spaces requires that there are, indeed, a range of political solutions acceptable to both sides. In other words, ending a war also requires that both sides believe that there is a peace to make.²⁶ Three obstacles to this eventuality often arise during wars.

The first difficulty is the nature of the objectives pursued by both sides. For peace, both sides must have minimum war objectives that are realisable and compatible.²⁷ This can be problematic where wars are value-based. Value-based wars are those in which objectives tend to be highly ideologised, intangible, and belief-centric. These kinds of war tend to be zero-sum in character, and a belligerent is likely to focus more on the importance of achieving the goal than on the cost of doing so.²⁸

They can be contrasted with issue-based wars in which the causes of conflict tend to revolve around such tangibles as land and resources. The latter are more amenable to political compromise than the former.²⁹ Value-based wars often tend to be associated with total war scenarios, or with civil wars, in which belligerents are engaged in struggles that they believe are existential in nature. But strong value-based dynamics can emerge in a conflict in many different ways, often as the result of the deliberate rhetorical strategies of governments and decision-makers. For this reason, wars may begin essentially issue-based, but become more value-based over time. Such tangibles as territory can be imbued with value-based attributes by a rhetorical focus on its symbolic importance in terms of history or national honour. Sacrifice can create value, in the sense that the more costly a war becomes the more a society will expect to get from it politically in order to justify the losses; politicians may seek to increase society's motivation in war by deliberately enhancing the value-based aspects of a conflict, portraying the struggle in essential terms, demonising the enemy, and raising the expected costs of defeat.³⁰ Under such conditions, moves towards political compromise

²⁶ Orme, *Paradox of Peace*, 149; Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 35; Bruce B. G. Clarke, "Conflict Termination: A Rational Model," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 16, no.1 (1993): 30; Adrian Guelke, "Negotiation and Peace Processes" in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction*, eds. John Darby and Roger MacGinty (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 63.

²⁷ Gray, *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory*, 13; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 14.

²⁸ Holl, "When War Doesn't Work," 277; Pillar, *Negotiating Peace*, 169-172; Adrian Guelke, "Negotiation and Peace Processes" in *Contemporary Peacemaking*, ed. Darby and MacGinty, 67-68.

²⁹ Nathalie J Frenslay "Ratification Processes and Conflict Termination," *Journal of Peace Research*, 35, no. 2 (March 1998): 172; Michael Rampy, "The Endgame: Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Activities," *Military Review* (October 1992): 48; Berenice A. Carroll, "War Termination and Conflict Theory: Value Premises, Theories, and Policies" in *How Wars End: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 392 (November 1970): 18 and 30; Robert F. Randle, *The Origins of Peace: A Study of Peacemaking and the Structure of Peace Settlements* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1973), 11-12; Ikle, *Every War Must End*, 83; Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security*, 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 136-175; I. William Zartman, "Dynamics and Constraints in Negotiations in Civil Wars," in *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil War*, ed. I. William Zartman (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1995): 3-29.

³⁰ Robert Harrison Wagner, "The Causes of Peace," in *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End*, ed. Roy Licklider, 257; Ikle, *Every War Must End*, 107; Guelke, "Negotiation and Peace Processes," 68-69.

can be easily portrayed as deeply unpatriotic, even treasonable.³¹ For example, in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1992-95, political entrepreneurs and elements of the media set about manipulating deliberately perceptions of history, resentment against the Yugoslav legacy, and existing communal identities creating as a result a bitter nationalist struggle, intensified by cycles of violence and counter-violence.³²

The second difficulty is the lack of trust that is likely to exist between belligerents. Even if a belligerent might wish to negotiate, they may not trust that an offer by an opponent to enter talks is a genuine one. There may be many tactical reasons why an adversary might not negotiate in good faith: they may simply be testing an opponent's resolve; or they may wish to garner the legitimacy that might be conferred on them through recognition that they are an equal negotiating partner; or entering negotiations may simply be a way of shaping domestic and international opinion; or they might wish to enter negotiations as a way of engineering a breakdown in talks that can be blamed on their opponent.³³ Even if a belligerent believes that an adversary does want a political settlement, they may not trust them to abide by it. Weaker parties, especially, may be subject to the problem of "credible commitment" - they may want peace, but they may not trust the other party to abide by it. In such circumstances they may well believe that peace will leave them worse off than if they continue fighting. This can be a particular problem if there is a previous history of failed political settlements between the warring parties.³⁴ This is one problem that undermines efforts to provide a solution to the current conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

The final issue is that of third party actors. Third party actors can often make an important contribution to overcoming the preceding two problems. Mediation efforts can help to create more effective channels of communication, new political options, and break down existing diplomatic log-jams. But third party actors can also help to overcome the credible commitment problem through such activities as neutral supervision, monitoring, and the guaranteeing of peace settlements; and through the deployment of political, economic, and military "carrots and sticks" to induce belligerents to abide by agreements that they sign. It may be, however, that the parties to an armed conflict cannot agree on mutually acceptable third party actors: in such cases, mediation may be more difficult, and the credible commitment problem is likely to be more intense.

Is peace too costly?

But even if an actor decides that war is not working; and even if there seems to be some kind of basis for a workable political settlement, there remain additional challenges that must be overcome before a war can be ended. One of these remaining difficulties is the cost of

³¹ Smoke, *Controlling Escalation*, 264.

³² See, for example, Neven Andjelic, *Bosnia Herzegovina: The End of a Legacy* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

³³ Allen E. Goodman and Sandra Clemens Boggart, *Making Peace: The United States and Conflict Resolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992), 7; Pillar, *Negotiating Peace*, 67-68; William T. R. Fox, "The Causes of Peace and Conditions of War," in *How Wars End*, 12.

³⁴ Jon Hovi, *Games, Threats and Treaties: Understanding Commitments in International Relations* (London: Pinter, 1998), 103-111; Guelke, "Negotiation and Peace Processes," 76.

peace, which can be divided loosely into two categories.

First, there are the costs to the belligerent of the effect of the termination of a war on its other political relationships. One recurring issue in this respect are perceptions internationally of credibility. War often activates latent interests: one powerful interest of concern to political actors is how they are viewed by others. Often, a belligerent may be willing to continue fighting even where the prospects of victory seem remote, because it believes that seeking a peace settlement will undermine wider perceptions of its credibility, resolve and commitment: other adversaries will become emboldened; relationships with allies will be undermined; efforts elsewhere to deter and coerce will be weakened.³⁵ This logic can be especially pernicious because the longer a war continues, and the higher the costs of fighting it have become, the more credibility is likely to be perceived to be at stake by seeking a negotiated end.

The second set of costs are domestic in nature, and apply to those groups within a belligerent that were associated with the decision to go to war. Elites do not always have the same interests as the political entity that they lead. Notably, such considerations as maintaining a grip on power, and self-preservation may be powerful animating interests that might trump broader imperatives to end a war.³⁶ Accepting that a war cannot be won carries for leaders a variety of possible costs. Some of these are psychological - the blow to their own self-esteem and self-belief. Some are political - the possible loss of political power through defeat in elections or through a coup. Depending upon the nature of the regime in question, the costs of defeat for leaders may be terminal in a physical sense.³⁷ Even where a leader is committed to ending a war, they may be reluctant to do so unless they can create conditions that avoid perceptions of humiliation. Leaders may prefer to continue a war in the hope that they get a better peace deal at the end of it. For example, President Richard Nixon was elected partly on his promise to end the war in Vietnam: but he continued the war until he could engineer a settlement that could be presented as “peace with honour.”

To worsen matters, belligerents often can be victims of their own rhetoric. In seeking to motivate domestic constituencies to fight, leaders may have promised victory; they may have presented the costs of defeat in apocalyptic terms; they may have vowed never to negotiate with the enemy. In such cases of course, the damage to the credibility of a belligerent and the domestic costs to leaders, of accepting anything less than total victory, may be that much greater.³⁸ For these reasons, war termination often requires, or results in, regime change in at least one of the protagonists.³⁹

In essence, then, a belligerent may resist the termination of a war, not because it believes necessarily that it will win, but because it wishes to avoid confronting the costs of defeat.

³⁵ Pillar, *Negotiating Peace*, 65-66.

³⁶ Elisabeth Stanley, *Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination and the Korean War* (Stanfield, CA: Stanfield University Press, 2009), 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9; John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 233; Orme, *Paradox of Peace*, 3; Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 13-14.

³⁸ See Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alistair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

³⁹ Stanley, *Paths to Peace*, 7-11.

Can the war be stopped?

However, even presuming that the leadership of a belligerent concludes that the costs of defeat, or of not achieving complete victory, are worth bearing, there remains another problem that must be resolved for a war to end: they must be able to convince key constituencies to back them in this decision. This issue can be expressed as one of dependency - how reliant is a political actor on other political actors; how dependent is the leadership of a belligerent on other domestic constituencies in order to exercise power? If dependency is high, then war termination decisions will require the agreement of others, making war termination more problematic.

Internationally, the decision to end a war may require the agreement of key “war-oriented actors”: those actors that have interests at stake in the conflict. These may be allies of the belligerents, great powers, regional actors or other interested parties. Sometimes, these may facilitate war termination by using their leverage to increase the costs of war - US pressure, for example, was one key reason for Britain’s decision to end military operations during the Suez crisis in 1956. But belligerents may also be reliant on allies who themselves may have an interest in the conflict continuing, or at least in not intervening to end it, either because they benefit directly, or because the domestic costs of applying pressure to end the war are too great for them. In complex conflicts with large numbers of war-oriented actors decisions to terminate a conflict may be international rather than national in nature.⁴⁰ Italy’s attempt to surrender to the allies in 1943, for example, was effectively negated by the unwillingness of Germany to allow them to do so. Decisions on whether and when to end the conflict in Afghanistan in 2014 were problematic because of the existence of Coalitions on both sides, and because of the important role played by such regional actors as Pakistan.

Domestically, terminating a war can be difficult because, as Fred Ikle argues: “The political struggle within a country affects everything that matters in ending a war.”⁴¹ Decisions on war termination can be extremely traumatic for a society: given the costs of war, and the political polarisation that war can cause, debates about whether to terminate a conflict short of complete success are often extremely divisive, and may be accompanied by vitriolic debates between “hawks” and “doves” and even violence.⁴² Almost all leaders rely on some constituency to sustain them in power, even in autocracies, whether this is a political party, the electorate, media, the military, oligarchs, or warlords.⁴³ As the political scientist Elisabeth Stanley

⁴⁰ Holl, “When War Doesn’t Work,” 287; Ikle, *Every War Must End*, 62-64; Randle, *The Origins of Peace*, 15.

⁴¹ Ikle, *Every War Must End*, 84; Roy Licklider, “How Civil Wars End: Preliminary Results From a Comparative Project,” Cimbala and Waldman, *Controlling and Ending Conflict*, 224; Stanley, *Paths to Peace*, 287; Dennis M. Drew and Donald M. Snow, *Making Strategy: An Introduction to National Security Processes and Problems* (Maxwell Airforce Base, AL: Air University Press, 1988), 43; James C. Gaston, ed., *Grand Strategy and the Decisionmaking Process* (Washington DC: National Defence University, 1992); Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, “Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy,” in *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, eds. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 12.

⁴² Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, 225; Frensey “Ratification Processes,” 171; Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict*, 188; Ikle, *Every War Must End*, 62.

⁴³ Bueno de Mesquita, et al, *The Logic of Political Survival*, 8; Stanley, *Paths to Peace*, 30-31.

asserts: “Coalitions form the backbone of most decisions and actions of a state; indeed, it is coalitions that make human activity ‘political.’ All leaders must create and maintain coalitions to accomplish anything productive, from raising taxes to ending a war.”⁴⁴ Where leaders are less dependent on these constituencies, they have more autonomy on decisions to end a war. This autonomy can cut both ways - Saddam Hussein’s relative autonomy allowed him to end the Gulf War in 1991 irrespective of the wishes of other constituencies. But Adolph Hitler’s relative autonomy allowed him to continue to protract the Second World War, despite the views of those in Germany who wished otherwise. Problems in war termination may therefore be a reflection of the domestic weakness of leaders and their inability to carry with them their key political constituencies; or they may result from the inability of domestic constituencies to influence effectively a reluctant leadership. There is some debate on whether particular regime types are more problematic than others in relation to war termination decisions. Wars involving democracies tend to be shorter, although this may be because democracies are more likely to fight wars that they think will be shorter.⁴⁵ Goemans argues that “mixed” regimes, those that are partially democratic, may be more unwilling to terminate conflicts than either democratic or autocratic regimes, because, for example, the consequences of defeat for political leaders can be more severe.⁴⁶

Have the underlying issues been resolved?

The preceding discussion illustrates the reasons why, historically, wars have often been very difficult to bring to an end. But there is a final point worth considering: even when wars have been concluded, perhaps with a formal peace settlement, this does not necessarily signal the final resolution of the political disagreements that brought about the conflict in the first place. There is a distinction, in other words, between the terminating of conflicts and their resolution. This is more than merely a matter of semantics because it speaks to the question “How do we define the ending of a war?” We might debate, for example, the reasons why the First World War ended. But for the historian E. H. Carr, the ending of the First World War, and the beginning of the Second, were so intimately linked that they constituted a single twenty year crisis.⁴⁷ In a similar vein we could investigate the reasons for the termination of the Six-Day War in 1967, or the Yom Kippur/Ramadan War of 1973. But each of these wars was a manifestation of a deep-seated Arab-Israeli dispute that continues today; in each case the wars were terminated, but the political disputes between many of the belligerents remained unresolved. This is hardly a new phenomenon. What we term The Hundred Years, for example, constituted a series of discrete conflicts, linked by similar underlying conditions that meant that the end of one war constituted only a pause before the next. Ramsbotham et al note that “the relationship between conflict resolution and the ending of violent conflict is not necessarily direct. The root causes of a conflict may persist without either a war or a peace

⁴⁴ Stanley, *Paths to Peace*, 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁶ Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 50-52; Reiter, *How Wars End*, 19-20.

⁴⁷ E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

settlement doing anything to address them.”⁴⁸ Thus, even when wars do end, they may simply establish an interregnum before the next one emerges. It is for this reason that the British soldier and strategist Basil Liddell Hart commented that: “It is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace that you desire... the prolongation of that policy through the war into the subsequent peace must always be borne in mind.”⁴⁹

This distinction between conflict termination and conflict resolution leads also to the difficult issue of perspective in the ending of wars: if a war ends, does it end for everybody? From a Western perspective, for example, we might debate the reasons for the end of the war in Iraq in 2009 because that is the date when Western forces withdrew the bulk of their combat formations, and many countries left completely. But Iraq was not left as a peaceful state; and from the perspective of many Iraqis, the current conflict against ISIS is not a new war, but simply a transformation of the conflict from 2003-2009. One additional problem in ending wars, then, is that even when they appear to end, they may actually only be paused, or they may simply continue in a different form.

Conclusions

Rationally, then, wars should end when both sides’ bargaining spaces come to overlap - a circumstance that should occur when at least one of the belligerents concludes that the costs of a war now outweigh the benefits. In practice, however, calculations regarding war termination are subject to a high degree of uncertainty. Often, belligerents will not have objective and incontestable information on how they are doing in a war; and even if they do, there may always be grounds for optimism that circumstances will improve in the future. Even if leaders conclude that their military circumstances are declining, peace requires that belligerents believe that there is a credible political settlement to be had. But in complex, value-led struggles a legitimate peace agreement may be difficult to visualise and/or problematic to implement. Moreover, leaders may persevere with war because they fear the wider costs of defeat, either for their country or group, or to themselves. Even if leaders wish to embrace peace, other powerful constituencies within a belligerent may not.

War termination may therefore be a slow and confused process. Indeed, the challenges involved in ending a war are not isolated, anachronistic, or the result necessarily of bad strategy or poverty in strategic thinking: they are pervasive structural difficulties that often defy any easy solution.

⁴⁸ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, & Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 159.

⁴⁹ Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (London: Meridian, 1991), 338.