

# 10 Theses on War and Social Order: Preliminary Arguments on the Constitutive Functions of Armed Conflicts\*

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At the beginning of the article, the author explains its idea—to explicate the conceptual approach to war as the most important structural element and mechanism for maintaining social order. The author claims the existence of a stable tradition of theorizing based on the argument about the social functionality of the structural violence, which allows interpreting war as a special type of sociality. The representatives of this conventional line of argumentation mentioned in the article are such key figures in the history of ideas, as Thomas Hobbes, Carl von Clausewitz, Carl Schmitt and Michel Foucault. The author formulates ten theses, which problematize the heuristic aspects of war in relation to the theory of social order and are accompanied by short comments explaining the ambivalent status of war topics in the philosophical tradition and sociological classics, because neither of them developed a complete theory of war relevant from the social theory perspective. The key theses state that war experience is constitutive for human societies, and reconstruct the line of argumentation that emphasizes the constitutive function of war for social institutions and political order and the role of war as a major factor of social transformations in the modernity for this role is often underestimated in sociological theory. In conclusion, the author states the need for analytical explication of the organized violence functionality in relation to the structures of social action typical for the modern era. He also claims that within the proposed social-theoretical perspective the war can become a heuristic key to understanding the nature of the social, because this approach allows not only to consider war as a cultural-universal phenomenon, but to analyze more realistically the structural role of violence in the processes of production, reproduction and transformation of social orders.

*Keywords:* war, social order, modernity, structural violence, Thomas Hobbes, Carl von Clausewitz, Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault

In this paper, I will question the heuristic aspects of war in relation to the theory of social order without focusing on the tradition of a textual analysis of the relevant works. There is a historical argument about the social functionality of structural violence that every war can be interpreted as a special kind of sociality. Although this line of argumentation has never been dominant in the Western tradition of studying war, it still deserves to be reconstructed in its pure form. This is my aim in this brief note. I believe that sometimes it is more important to develop a preliminary, (as we always hope) interesting,

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and coherent framework for interpretation than to prove that our understanding is fully consistent in every detail with the text or phenomenon under consideration. I hope that the explication of such a “research program” will be useful from a heuristic point of view as a demonstration of the potential of one conceptual approach to the study of war, this “genuine chameleon” (Clausewitz). In the future, some of my theses can be verified, and the writings of the representatives of this conventional line of theorizing from Hobbes to Foucault will hopefully confirm them. In the meantime, I would like to present and briefly comment on the preliminary ten theses uncovering the social-functional understanding of war. I will begin with the more-or-less obvious positions, and finish with the counterintuitive ones that define war as a key to understanding the social as such.

**1. War is the basic social experience possessing constitutive significance for the development of political, social, and economic structures.**

Obviously, war is a form of social action, and the collective action implying the use of organized violence. In any typology of social actions, war takes a special place due to the extreme conditions of its occurrence fraught with the deaths of military “interaction” participants. War is a universal feature of human society, an example of cultural universals. Since ancient times, the entire cultural history of humankind has proven that armed conflicts are a fundamental social experience reflected in the political, economic, and technical development of the societies involved.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, war as the highest form of organized violence is an ambivalent phenomenon due to its structural connections with social order. In his comparative studies of the spiritual constitution of different civilizations, Max Weber indicated the structuring importance of the organization and method of warfare for the further socio-economic and political development of Western and non-Western societies.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, one cannot but agree with the statement of Douglass North and his co-authors that the way the societies choose to face and overcome the eternal and ubiquitous threat of structural violence defines the structures and forms human interaction takes, including the types of political and economic systems (North, Wallis, Weingast, 2009).

**2. Despite the recognition of its social-constitutive character, the interpretation of war in the philosophical tradition and history of social thought is still ambivalent.**

On one hand, the logos of war is as old as the cultural history of humankind itself. In this sense, the thousand-year experience of armed violence is certainly reflected in the texts of philosophical, historical-scientific, and social-theoretical tradition. It is enough to look through the collections of texts of philosophers and theologians on war to ascertain that few major thinkers did not comment on it in some form.<sup>3</sup> There are Aristotle's

1. See, e.g., a collection of works on the comparative military history of ancient societies: Meißner, Schmitt, Sommer, 2005.

2. Thus, in the study of the major spiritual traditions of ancient China, he showed how the Chinese cities' lack of autonomous military force affected the further development of the social-economic and political structures, so different from the evolution of the Western cities. See Weber (1988: 291–292).

3. In this sense, one of the representative examples is a collection of philosophical texts on war published

arguments on the most effective strategy to protect the polis, Cicero's formulations of the Roman understanding of *bellum justum* (later developed in the works of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas), Machiavelli's analysis of the relations of war and politics, the Hobbesian model of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, Spinoza's consideration of the organization of armed forces, Rousseau's estimates of the quality of troops, Kant's (and Hegel's) understanding of the role of war in human history, and the analysis of socio-economic conditions of war by Marx and especially Engels, etc. Thus, the discursive expression of the cultural-universal experience of war, starting in Antiquity with the questioning of the rationality of war as a political means and continuing in the legal and moral debates of the Middle Ages and early Modernity on the legality and fairness of warfare in terms of religion or natural law, adopted the form of various philosophical, theological and sociological discourses in the modern era. In other words, reflections on armed violence are a part of the basic repertoire of European spiritual history, which often considered war actions in a broad social context (Kleemeier, 2002).

On the other hand, this old tradition of interpreting war consists of a number of traditional questions and problem fields that can be differentiated into such stable toposes such as *the concept of war, just war, war and politics, condemnation and prevention of war*, etc. These toposes consider war mainly as a negative element that is opposed to peace as the desired state. Such an approach identifies war not so much as an independent object of social theory, but as a pathology of social practice demanding moral condemnation and correction by means of political action. The interest in war here is in fact theoretically secondary, and derived from the normative idea of the proper (peace).

### **3. Sociology as a modern scientific discourse on social order has theoretically ignored war for a long time, considering it a violation of the stability of social action structures.**

The emergence of sociology is a genetic part of the Western modernity project. At the time of its formation as an independent social discipline, many scientists believed that Western societies had already basically realized the utopia of eternal internal reconciliation, and that Leviathan was acting as a legitimate monopolist in the field of structural violence. Such a self-description of modernity formed the basis of the implicit consensus within the new science. As Michael Mann puts it, war and structural violence were not so much "undertheorized", but simply ignored by social scientists.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless, the sociological classics did not develop its own "theory of war", although there are many pages devoted to the relevant issues in the writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. War has never been considered a central issue of mainstream sociological studies. However, it has always been a mandatory part of all important contexts thematically linked to it. Even after the beginning of the scientific and theoretical reflection on

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in the last decade in Germany for educational purposes; it consists of excerpts from the writings of Cicero and Augustine, Luther and Machiavelli, Spinoza and Rousseau, Nietzsche and Sartre, etc. See Czeliński, Stenzel (2004).

4. See Mann (1988: 147).

war, the research focused mainly on such topics as rationality and limits of war, internal logic, and processual dynamics of organized violence, etc. At the same time, and for a very long period of time, there were no social-theoretical works explicitly examining the impact of war on the structures of modern societies. It has been only relatively recently that the studies of war in the context of the establishment of social order have taken their rightful place in sociological and social-philosophical reflection. There is only a short history of this type of social-theoretical analysis of war, and therefore war can still be considered as a relatively new subject of sociological research.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. It is a sociological fact that war can both destroy and create social structures.**

It should be mentioned immediately that we are not talking about an apology for or the legitimization of war, but simply stating the obvious: on one hand, every war is an unambiguous indicator of the collapse of social order that had already taken place, while on the other hand, every war is a necessary condition for constituting a new social order. The latter may be more sustainable than the former, but, in any case, it possesses the same ontology as all regularities of the social actions, which ultimately depend on the de facto recognition of social actors.

Within the tradition that began with the works of Hobbes, we can explicate genetic and structural functions of war on the establishment of social order in the modern society-state. Moreover, from such a perspective, every existing social order interspersed with relations of power and submission is always a result of the previous latent or open war. The problematization of the constitutive nature of war in modern societies helps to reveal the productive social effects produced by war through organized armed violence. In fact, we are talking about its functions related to the establishing, strengthening, and protection of the integrity, viability, and efficiency of modern societies (Dierk, 2008: 9).

#### **5. In the history of ideas, there is a line of argumentation that emphasizes the constitutive function of war for social institutions and political order.**

In the analysis of the structural impact of war on social order, many concepts and intuitions of the classics of philosophical and social-theoretical thought which recognized politically-motivated violence as an ever-present option that played an important role in the conceptualization of the historical experience of modernity retain their heuristic importance. Thus, the classic works of Thomas Hobbes, Carl von Clausewitz, Carl Schmitt, and Michel Foucault are heuristically relevant for the social-theoretical explication of the role of war in the processes of (re)production and transformation of social order. These political writers emphasize the social functionality of war, and its fundamental role for

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5. I mean primarily the “new historical sociology,” focusing on the state and the associated phenomena of organized violence. The representatives of this approach not only managed to analytically reconstruct the role of the state and the apparatus of coercion in the genesis of modernity, but also to radically reconsider the previous ideas about modernization as a holistic, consistent, and non-violent process. It is enough to mention the works of A. Giddens, M. Mann, Ch. Tilly, etc., all of whom primarily studied such issues as the emergence of the modern state, and the impact of inter-state competition and violence on the course of social processes in modernity. See Spohn (2005).

the political. With the help of war-military optics, they discovered the essence of social-economic and power relations in historically-contingent military conflicts. Despite being adherents of different traditions, these authors all sought to conceptualize the ambivalence of violence that can produce productive social effects.

Certainly, there are significant differences between these authors' positions at the semantic level. For instance, Clausewitz considers war as the continuation of political communication by other means, or, in short, "war is the continuation of state policy." For Schmitt, on the contrary, war and politics are identical, i.e., the political finds its most adequate expression in war. Foucault, in his turn, elegantly reverses the idea of Clausewitz, and defines war as not the continuation of state policy, but the opposite, that is, state policy is the continuation of war. Hobbes directly states that war, particularly civil war, is the opposite of the order guaranteed by the sovereign identified with the modern state. Schmitt substantiates the political tension of allegedly reconciled modern societies, emphasizing the ever-present existential dimension of political action that can always turn into war in a "serious case."

At the same time, there is an obvious and close intertwining of the concepts of social order and war in the works of these authors. For Clausewitz, war is a form of the external projection of order in one's own interests, and a dangerous form, because war threatens that order. Clausewitz constantly warns that war is unpredictable; it does not lead to any sustainable results and, therefore, can have unpredictable consequences for the territory (and its existing social order). The same idea is found in the works of Schmitt, who goes even further and analyzes the political with the help of a dynamic model presupposing the constant possibility of destruction and the creation of order. Foucault concurs with his statement that social order is an image, a way of transforming the structure of power, the rationality of which corresponds to the rationality of war. In addition, in their interpretations of war, all of these authors emphasize the crucial importance of structural violence (war being the most intensive form) as a deliberate attempt to force the counter-parties to certain actions within every form of social order, i.e., they stress that the politically-motivated use of violence aims to impose/save/change social order.

Numerous substantive intersections in the writings of these authors and their correspondent polemics are of particular interest in the study of this line of argumentation. It is enough to mention the reception of ideas comparing Schmitt–Hobbes, Schmitt–Clausewitz, Schmitt–Foucault, Foucault–Hobbes, or Clausewitz–Foucault, in which we can see both a certain continuity and the evident gaps in the understanding of the social implications of armed violence. In any case, all of these authors proposed heuristically-interesting theoretical models explaining the birth of social order out of the spirit of war.

## **6. War is not archaic, or simply a part of bygone history; it is a typical feature and an essential element of modernity.**

The discourse of modernity considered war as mainly an anomie and deviation and not as a constitutive part of the modernization processes in Western societies, and therefore attempted to eliminate war from public practice as a relic of the pre-modern era.

Anthony Giddens wrote about a certain paradox in this context. On one hand, the role of war, which, in combination with diplomacy, actually determined the establishment of the European system of states, is generally accepted; on the other hand, sociological discussions ignore the issues of the impact of military aspects on the development of civil rights and other important features of the societal organization of modernity (Giddens, 1985: 232).

M. Janowitz wrote that macro-sociology showed very little interest in the identification of the impact of war institutions on Western nation states, which is difficult to explain given the critical importance of armed conflicts in the formation of structures in modern societies (Janowitz, 1975: 70). This can only be explained by the naive humanistic assumption of modern social science that traditionally defined violence as a vestige of the past in the reconciled present, i.e., as a problem of social practice that requires correction, but not as a cultural universal deserving the status of an independent subject of social-theoretical reflection.

Despite the obvious role of wars and revolutions in the historical dynamics of existing societies and the continuation as driving forces of social transformation in modernity, sociological theory is only approaching adequate analytical explications of the functionality of organized violence in relation to the structures of social actions typical of the modern era.

### **7. War is not the opposite of social order, but rather its expression and continuation.**

Returning to our initial question of the nature of the connections between war and social order, we must admit that, firstly, war is not a natural phenomenon, but a result and expression of the created order. However, war is the *ultima ratio* in a completely different sense than is commonly believed. War is not the most extreme among all possible solutions, but rather the last decision which leads to a radical transformation, or even to the end of the current structure of order. In this sense, a stable social order is a prerequisite for taming violence, and violence is a prerequisite for maintaining social order (Popitz, 1986: 69).

Therefore, war is the most important part of social order under such a construction of the political. Thus, military power and the readiness to use it are ambivalent by definition: they are both a major threat to social order (if military resources are used for the benefit of individuals or various political or religious groups), and a prerequisite for maintaining social order and its protection from external and internal enemies.

### **8. War does not end with the establishment of social order, but becomes a structural part of it as a constant possibility of a collective action.**

War (primarily civil war) is an existential threat to every statehood. However, this threat does not come from somewhere outside; it is an ever-present immanent option, structurally connected with social order based on the *de facto* recognition of rational actors. This option means a constant possibility exists of a dramatic weakening and, under certain circumstances, the subsequent collapse of the entire political structure (for

Hobbes it is the death of Leviathan as a mortal God). This option cannot be excluded simply due to the specific features of the horizontally constituted political relations, which are characterized by a considerable uncertainty regarding the future behavior of partners acting as competitors in the permanent struggle for scarce material and symbolic resources.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, within the institutional forms of the existing social order, the radical-military optics allows for the discovery of the consequences of the real battles of the past, since those victories and defeats not only left a deep structural mark on the present, but continue to affect it in different forms despite the semblance of order and peace (Foucault).

An adequate social-theoretical analysis of the problem of social order requires the recognition of the potentially ever-open option of collective violence. This requirement allows for the consideration of war not so much as a deviation from the normal course of social processes or as an extreme political measure (*ultima ratio*), but rather as a basic condition of human coexistence (*conditio humana*). In fact, even the establishment of the modern state's monopoly on armed violence, which led to the significant internal reconciliation of societies of the modern type, did not completely force violence out of social practices, but merely provided it with new organizational forms. The intensification of an internal feud up to the level of armed conflict between political opponents who suddenly turn into existential enemies is an ever-present potential option and a structural feature of social order. Its historically regular actualization proves that we are dealing with the specifics of the social ontology depending at any given moment on the actual, rather than normative, acceptance of the actors (Schmitt).

### **9. The goal of the heuristically-oriented sociological theory of war is an explication of its social and functional nature.**

The sociological reflection on war and its functions should primarily focus on the explication of the role of structural violence in establishing and maintaining social order, i.e., on the attempts to explore the structuring potential of organized violence or "sociality of war," according to the precise wording of Alexander Filippov (1991: 262).

Thus, the social theory of war is to study the phenomena of armed coercion and violence as structural elements of social order. Needless to say, such research is possible only within a framework of a radically-revised theory of modernity, free of excessively-optimistic pathos and progressivism ideology that are inadequate for the reconstruction of real historical processes associated with such unpleasant phenomena as war and other forms of organized violence. Sociology as an institutionalized self-reflection of modern

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6. In this context, Niklas Luhmann mentioned the paradox of "double contingency" that demonstrates the fragility of social order under the conditions when the actions of one actor are determined by the actions or expectations of relevant actions of other actors. Moreover, this bilateral dependence is simultaneous, i.e., every party can know the decision of the other party only after making its own choice. That is, such political-communicative optics makes social order fundamentally problematic, because actors, as rational egoists pursuing their own goals, need to know about the behavior of their partners which the latter do not yet know themselves, etc. See Luhmann (2001: 10).

societies must give up some of the illusions of its founding fathers who tried to neutralize the violent aspect of the political and eliminate war from the normative description of modernity as its secondary, or even archaic, phenomenon more significant for the historical past than for the social present of the West (Knöbl, 1995: 19–20).

**10. The recognition of the constitutional nature of war does not mean its legitimization; this recognition is rather a prerequisite for understanding the essence of the social as such.**

The approach we consider here has nothing to do with the moral justification or legitimization of war by means of social theory. It is rather about the theoretical interpretation of war as a form of social action constitutive for the social as such. We are not talking about giving up the concepts of the moral and normative state of peace, which are undoubtedly important for both the history of ideas and social practice. It is rather an attempt to discover the regularities of social action in the dramatic events of the past and the present with the help of analytical tools. In this sense, the humanistic pathos of the progress of civilization can become an obstacle for the heuristics of war. Since the Enlightenment, this pathos has constantly been trying to drive the social studies of war into the framework of the proper (or more precisely, improper), describing war as something excessive, abnormal, and irrational.

The social-theoretical perspective we are trying to reconstruct here not only defines war as a universal cultural phenomenon, but also allows for a more realistic analysis of the structural role of violence in the processes of the production, the reproduction, and the transformation of social orders. That is, a certain definition of war may become a key to understanding the nature of social order, or the “principle of the power relations analysis” (Foucault). The works of the above-mentioned giants of philosophical and social-theoretical thought who considered war as a constitutive experience of modernity and sought to understand the social-ontological implications of war are an important heuristic resource in the cognitive process we are interested in.

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## 10 тезисов о войне и социальном порядке: предварительные рассуждения о конститутивной функции вооруженных конфликтов

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В начале статьи формулируется ее замысел, заключающийся в экспликации концептуального подхода к войне как важнейшему структурному элементу и механизму поддержания социального порядка. Утверждается существование устойчивой традиции теоретизирования, в рамках которой традиционным является аргумент о социальной функциональности структурного насилия, позволяющий интерпретировать войну как особый тип социальности. В качестве представителей этой условной линии аргументации называются такие ключевые фигуры истории идей, как Томас Гоббс, Карл фон Клаузевиц,

Карл Шмитт и Мишель Фуко. Далее выдвигаются 10 тезисов, в которых проблематизируются эвристические аспекты войны применительно к теории социального порядка. Тезисы сопровождаются краткими комментариями. В них констатируется амбивалентный статус топик войны в философской традиции и социологической классике, так и не создавших полноценной теории войны, релевантной с точки зрения социальной теории. В основных содержательных тезисах говорится о том, что опыт войны имеет конститутивный характер для человеческих обществ. Здесь же реконструируется линия аргументации, подчеркивающая конститутивную функцию войны применительно к социальным институтам и политическим порядкам. Также подчеркивается роль войны как важнейшего фактора общественной трансформации в Новое время, который часто остается недооцененным в социологической теории. В заключение формулируется задача аналитической экспликации функциональности организованного насилия применительно к структурам социального действия, характерным для эпохи Модерна. Утверждается, что в реконструированной в статье социально-теоретической перспективе война может выступать эвристическим ключом к пониманию самой природы социального, позволяющим не только рассматривать войну как культурно-универсальный феномен, но и более реалистично анализировать структурную роль насилия в процессах производства, воспроизводства и трансформации социальных порядков.

*Ключевые слова:* война, социальный порядок, модерн, структурное насилие, Томас Гоббс, Карл фон Клаузевиц, Карл Шмитт, Мишель Фуко