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THE INFLUENCE OF WAR UPON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS¹

Abstract: *Sir Lawrence Freedman, a Fellow of the British Academy and Emeritus Professor of war studies at King's College in London, analyses the evolution of the most representative conceptions of war in Europe and the United States, from the last quarter of the 19th century to the present day. His analysis is of holistic type, the author using the writings of military authorities, official documents, novels (including the ones in the category "science fiction") or famous films.*

The main concepts analysed by the author in this work, during 25 chapters, are: decisive battle, indecisive battle, total war, nuclear war (with the principles of "the first strike capability" and "mutually assured destruction", i. e. the famous MAD), the wars of "failed states", terrorism, counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, hybrid warfare, war with the help of drones and battle robots. The author achieved a work that could be included in the broad field of polemology but offering a paradigm of Realistic type in the interpretation of international relations.

Keywords: *War, International Relations, Decisive Battle, Indecisive Battle, Failed State, Terrorism, Counterinsurgency, Hybrid Warfare.*

Raymond Aron stipulated in 1962, during the Cold War, that the international relations "take place within the shadow of war" (*Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Introduction).

It seemed that Raymond Aron's statement became obsolete after 1989, with the disappearance of the socialist world system, ending with the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 and accession of the US to the rank of the world's only superpower. The famous Francis Fukuyama spoke of the "end of history" and of the traditional military conflicts, the doctrine of realism was discredited within the Theory of International Relations and several experts believed that geoeconomics and geoculture would replace classical geopolitics.

This somewhat idyllic picture of international relations gradually changed, but in-depth, with 2008 Russia's military intervention in Georgia, when Russia and China

¹ Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: a History*, 1st edition, New York, Public Affairs, 2017, 400 pp., notes, bibliography, index.

began to challenge in a systematic, but increasingly aggressive way, *Pax Americana* and the international establishment. Also, various opinions have emerged, according to which globalisation would be slowed for the time being and now the “old” secret diplomacy regarding the division of spheres of influence would manifest.

The Realism has returned to the attention of researchers (see especially the present impact of the work of Robert D. Kaplan, an adherent of this school of thought in International Relations Theory). Also, the considerations of John J. Mearsheimer, founder of the “offensive realism”, according to which unbalanced multipolar systems may be more dangerous than the bipolar system during the Cold War, are unfortunately confirmed by Russia’s military interventions in Ukraine and Syria, the new arming race (including nuclear), US-China and US-EU trade wars etc. In short, the post-1991 world became more democratic, more prosperous – in principle, but certainly less stable than it was during the Cold War.

The work analysed in the following lines, written by Lawrence David Freedman, a well-known British expert in Strategic studies, a disciple of Michael Howard, confirms once more the statement as mentioned earlier of Raymond Aron. In the Introduction to this remarkable work, textually he states that “there is no longer a dominant model for future war, but instead a blurred concept and a range of speculative possibilities”.

The 25 chapters of the book are divided into three parts.

The first part, divided into nine chapters, analyses the conceptions and literature on war from the mid-19th century to the end of the Cold War (1990), focusing on such topics as decisive and indecisive battles, “the House of Strife” (basically related to the Pacifism movement), using of cruelty in war, failures of peace, total war and “the balance of terror” (i.e. nuclear terror). The last two chapters (*Stuck in the Nuclear Age and A surprise peace*) practically foreshadow the entrance into the post-1990 era, when nuclear weapons guaranteed, as in the previous Cold War period, world peace. Considerations about the nuclear arms race and its famous specific terms: “the first strike capability”, “mutually assured destruction” (MAD) and “flexible response”, are impressive.

The second part, divided into other ten chapters, highlights the attempts to define the “war of the future”, marked by the intervention of Western troops in various failed or semi-failed states, the role of mineral resources and “barbarism” in these wars, terrorism, counter-terrorism, insurgency and counter-insurgency.

The author points out in the chapter *A science of war* that the most important concern of researchers in the field of international relations, the analysis of the risk of war between the great powers, may become irrelevant if civil wars are not taken into account. He shows later that in 1963 was launched in the University of Michigan

“Correlates of War (COW) Project”, financed by Carnegie Foundation. In the frame of this project, a database, i.e. “Militarized Interstates Disputes” (MID), was created. This database is until nowadays used by researches, without them obtain indisputable results, especially in the field of “counting the dead”.

The conclusions of the last chapter (*Cure not prevention*) are quite pessimistic: the post-1990 interventions made by American, British and French troops to stop the violence in the civil wars did not give, generally, the expected results.

The third part of the book contains six chapters and refers to a series of new phenomena that have appeared in the international arena especially after 2008: hybrid and cyberwars, the use of battle robots and drones, violence in mega-cities, new theories regarding the future of war.

The last chapter, *The Future of the Future of War*, contains rather pessimistic conclusions. In principle, Western troops should have easily defeated their opponents by simple firepower and superior military equipment, but have found themselves involved in long and costly “low intensity” conflicts, due to the support of the local population for these insurgents. Also, at present, there are no reasonable possibilities to stop civil wars and even interstate wars.

Analysing the masterpiece of Sir Lawrence Freedman, some conclusions are necessary. Undoubtedly, we have to deal with a scientific approach that goes beyond the frameworks of a classic work of strategy or even of polemology, operating significant introspections in the Theory of International Relations and Security Studies.

The author uses an impressive bibliography (823 titles) that do not lack the titles of military theorists (Giulio Douhet, J. F. C. Fuller, Colmar von der Goltz, Antoine-Henri Jomini, B. H. Liddell Hart, Erich Ludendorff, Mao Zedong), the novels of famous authors (Isaac Asimov, Tom Clancy, Conan Doyle, George Orwell, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells), various official documents, and making a series of references to the Star Wars movie series.

In this context, we are dealing with a holistic approach made by the author, who studies the war seen by war practitioners and military theorists, military historians, experts in geopolitics, international relations theory and security studies, famous authors of utopian, science fiction and futurological writings, film directors. In this respect, as far as we know, Lawrence Freedman’s approach is so far unique in the world.

However, like any pioneering work, it cannot be exhaustive. The author states in the Introduction that he has focused his scientific work preponderantly on the United Kingdom and the USA (i.e. “the focus is largely but not solely on the United Kingdom and the United States”).

In our opinion, the value of the book would have increased exponentially if references had been made to the war conceptions of China, India, Islamic states in the 20th-21st centuries, and there would have been a few more references (in fact, there are some) to war conceptions promoted by the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation.

The philosophy that dominates this book belongs rather to Realism. The author cites the works of illustrious representatives of this current (E. H. Carr, Robert D. Kaplan, Henry Kissinger, John J. Mearsheimer, Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz), who have dominated or still dominate the debates of ideas regarding the nature and meaning of international relations. There are also quoted liberals (starting with Norman Angell) and, of course, Hedley Bull, a famous representative of the “English School” in International Relations, who tried to achieve (we believe, with great success) a *via media* between Liberalism and Realism. However, Realists and not Liberalists predominantly insist on the inevitability of war, and Lawrence Freedman implicitly defends this thesis in work brought to the readers’ attention.

The Realism is traditionally sceptical about the possibility of elimination of wars between nations, relying in particular on a series of immutable characteristics of human nature, inclined towards gaining power and domination. Or, as stipulated since the 5th century B.C. a famous forerunner of Realism (Thucydides), “human behaviour is always guided by fear (*phobos*), self-interest (*kerdos*), and honour (*doxa*)”.

Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the fundamental predictions in the last chapter of Lawrence Freedman’s work sounds as follows: “War therefore has a future. It can make an appearance wherever there is a combination of intensive dispute and available forms of violence”.

Human nature has not changed practically since the time of Thucydides, so that the fear of leaders of large or small powers of not being surprised unprepared from the military point of view, the own interest of some manufacturers and traffickers of weapons or the “honour” of some political leaders or warlords can easily lead, even in the 21st century, to war.

That is why, unfortunately, the Realistic paradigm remains the most reasonable instrument of analysis of international relations and the work of Sir Lawrence Freedman enriches its arsenal of conclusions and explanations.