Holsti, Kalevi J. *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648-1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1991), Chapters 1 (pp. 1-24) and 12 (pp. 306-334).

Chapter 1: "On the Study of War"

Academic literature on war poses several difficulties. Clearly war is not monocausal, and almost any cause from the genetic to the celestial (e.g., sunspots) can play some role in triggering war. The democratic peace seems fairly well established, as do several almost trivially obvious conclusions – for example, that adjoining states are more likely to go to war – but otherwise findings vary wildly and research remains resolutely inconclusive.

Traditional analysis of ecological variables can suggest probabilities of conflict, but not pinpoint precise explanations for why war did or did not occur in a given instance. Further, the implied primacy of ecological variables verges on determinism. As J. David Singer makes clear, the ecological correlates of war are important but only underlying causes of war; a sequence of choices by the states involved is most often the proximate cause and thus vital. But subsequent scholars have ignored Singer's admonishments. Further, quantitative studies of war usually equate all wars: they are but interchangeable data points to be thrown in the heartless engine of regression. This discards valuable information about the context and meaning of a war to its participants, who may not have shared the modern, liberal perception of war as a terrible deviance. Clausewitz, for one, conceived of war as simply one rational policy tool among many. The participants recognize clear issues over which they fight, and ecological features like the balance of power fade into mere necessary conditions.

Studies employing non-ecological factors – psychological, perceptual, organizational – also raise problems. Again, they consider war in semi-deterministic, process-based terms, and again they take war to be inherently suboptimal. An additional difficulty arises in the small number of cases (1914, the Cuban missile crisis, sometimes Vietnam) bearing almost the entire brunt of such analyses.

Holsti proposes to rectify these faults by concentrating on three factors in a historical and ecological analysis of war. He lays out an informal model involving states which must provide survival-related services, and may also choose to pursue further goals (ideological, reputational, etc.). Purposive and rational if sometimes mistaken decisions are undertaken within idiosyncratic socio-economic and institutional frameworks. Such a model focuses on three generally understudied aspects of war:

- The *issues* that produce conflict.
- The social and intellectual context that provide particular *meaning* to particular wars.
- The link between *peace settlements* and ensuing wars.

To this end, Holsti proposes to begin with an inductive study of the general issues that begat wars during various historical eras. He reads history and tries to consider what the original combatants (who need not have agreed) believed they were fighting over in every war affecting the European state-system from 1648 until 1989. The focus on peace treaties reflects their importance in defining and crafting what were hoped to be new and better world orders: they reveal the war-related aspirations and fears of the contemporary leadership. In this they form part of an unending cycle of peace and war.[1] The nature of a peace is influenced by the war that preceded it, and will in turn affect the succeeding conflict.

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[1] But not of war and peace: Holsti apparently believes he is in imminent danger of being confused with Tolstoy should he employ the more common formulation.

Chapter 12: “War: Issues, Attitudes, and Explanations”

Holsti begins this chapter with tables showing how frequently, according to his reading of history, various issues contributed to the start of wars. He then examines trends in these issues over time – which are become more frequent (and thus, presumably, more important), which have dwindled.

Economic issues have always caused some wars, but their importance has declined as leaders realized that war’s disruption of commerce overbalanced any potential postwar gains. Similarly, *territory* is always a common source of interstate friction, but the proportion of wars it triggers has been declining since the Napoleonic era. Territory with intrinsic strategic or economic worth, though, remains ever contentious. *State creation* is a less stable issue; it is far the most common cause of war in the 1815-1914 and post-1945 periods, but its general trend is of a minor factor increasing slowly. *Ideological* factors have quickly and steadily increased from complete irrelevance before 1713 to being a partial ground for almost half of all wars post-1945. *Sympathy* for one’s ethnic or religious comrades has been a relatively constant spur to war, especially for the Russians. *Predation*, an attempt to eliminate another state entirely, reached its heyday in the fascist era but has had abiding significance since 1648. Most other causes are either minor in the modern era – people just don’t appreciate a good dynastic conflict these days – or directly complements of one of the above causes (as when a state “protects its imperial integrity” by battling a nationalist movement for state creation).

Generally, then, concrete issues (economic and territorial conflicts) have been declining as causes of war, while abstract issues (self-determination, ideology, and sympathy) have been increasing. This may be because it is easier to establish mechanisms to regulate tangible issues. Going out on a limb, Holsti predicts that most wars in the near future will be in the developing world, because the latter features weak states that have not yet found their place in the emergent global community. In the future one might also see overpopulation-induced environmental conflicts, more trade wars, or wars against drugs or terrorism.

Attitudes towards war, especially the attitudes of élites, may matter: the more war is considered an acceptable, non-aberrant policy tool, the likelier it is. Hitler was more apt to attack Chamberlain than be attacked by him, because the former thought war honourable whilst the latter deemed it reprehensible. War’s appeal has generally trended downwards over the centuries, though occasionally countervailing trends (nineteenth-century political philosophy, totalitarianism) have reversed the process. Other patterns recur, too: immediately after particularly destructive wars bellicosity tends to decrease markedly. And nuclear weaponry has rapidly advanced the distaste for violent conflict, at least among the powerful states that can afford them: disputes among nations not party to weapons of mass destruction need not predicate their strategic calculus on their effects.

For questions of peace and war, three major schools of thought have arisen in IR. The findings of this study support or contradict them to varying degrees. (*Neo-*)*realism*, with its complete negation of non-structural issues or differentiation of states, is largely rejected: “To argue that we have war because of systems structures is analogous to an argument that we have automobile accidents because of highways” (331). *World-society models* that emphasize the fundamental unity of all peoples have their value, but are of little value in examining questions of war; after all, war tends to reflect a feeling of pronounced difference among peoples. (Further, Holsti finds such theories implicitly ethnocentric.) *Transnational relations* – pluralism á la Keohane and Nye – fares better. Its emphasis on non-state actors like irredenta and terrorists reflects the increasing importance of what were above termed state-creation and sympathy conflicts, and better incorporate Holsti’s conception of where war shall go in the future.