THE ROLE OF WAR IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

ÚLOHA VÁLKY V MEZINÁRODNÍ POLITICE

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Anotace:
Třebaže válka není již dlouho považována za oprávněný a přiměřený způsob řešení mezinárodních sporů, válka je stále cenným nástrojem politiky. Předkládaný článek analyzuje roli války v mezinárodní politice. Vysvětluje úlohu války z pohledu státu, systému států a mezinárodní společnosti, a popisuje omezení přijatá ke kontrole války. Článek ukazuje, že navzdory kodifikaci ius contra bellum jako primárního pravidla ovládajícího mezistátní vztahy, válka není slábnoucí společenskou praxí mezinárodní politiky.

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Definition

War is an act of organized violence carried out by political units against each other.¹ There are two important implications of this definition. Firstly, violence is not war unless it is carried out in the name of a political unit. Secondly, violence carried out in the name of a political unit is not war unless it is directed against another political unit.

Function

In the modern international system, the functions of war, as a social practice, may be considered from three perspectives: that of an individual state, that of the system of states, and that of the society of states.²

From the point of view of an individual state, war has been an instrument of policy, one of the means by which states objectives may be attained. As Clausewitz put it, war is a continuation of policy by other means-so,³ states, which possess the legitimate authority to use force, may resort to war for whatever political purpose they deem appropriate.
From the point of view of the system of states, war has been the principle mechanism, in what Waltz called, the distribution of capabilities, an element reflecting the distribution of power across states in the system, and, at one and the same time, an ultimate arbiter of the shape of the system and the position of states within it. It is war, in this respect, that helps to determine whether particular states survive or are eliminated, whether they rise or decline.

From the point of view of the society of states, war has a dual aspect. On the one hand, war is a manifestation of disorder, a threat of breakdown of the society of states itself and of a return to a pre-society state of affairs where war of all against all prevails. Specifically, it means that the society of states limits war to keep it within the common rules laid down by the society of states itself. On the other hand, war, as an instrument of states policies and a basis determinand of the shape of the system, is a means that the society of states employs to achieve its own purposes. Specifically, it means that the society of states embarks on war to promote the common values and interests laid down by the society of states itself. In other words, war holds an ambiguous role from this perspective of being simultaneously the decisive threat to the society of states, and the instrument of protecting it.

Limits

The institutions and rules, which the society of states has established, reflect that dual aspect of war. On the one hand, the society of states has been impelled to restrict and contain war. Specifically, the right to wage war, *jus ad bellum*, was restricted to sovereign states. It was the 1648 Peace of Westphalia that codified the principle of sovereignty, and its corollary rule of non-intervention, and that confined the right to wage war to sovereign states as the prerogative of their sovereignty. The society of states also restricted the way in which war is waged, *jus in bello*, as articulated in the final acts of 1899 and 1907 Hague conferences, the four 1949 Geneva Conventions, and two 1977 Additional Protocols for instance. In addition to restriction imposed on the conduct of war, the society of states also limited the geographical spread of war by enunciating laws of neutrality, laying down rights and duties of neutrals and belligerents in relation to each other. Finally, and most importantly, the society of states restricted the purposes for which states may resort to war, and what constitutes a just cause for which war may be waged: war, once having been considered, a legitimate and proportionate means for resolving international disputes, was limited to the right of self-defense, individual or collective, against aggression. It was the 1945 Charter of the United Nations that confined the right to war to self-defense against the violation of the territorial integrity or political independence of a state.

On the other hand, the society of states has also sought to use war as a means to protect and enforce common rules, to protect common values and to maintain international order: a critical aspect of war, bearing in mind that international order lacks mechanisms of just change. Specifically, the goals of the United Nations, as laid down
by its Charter, are to develop friendly relations among states, to achieve international co-operation and solve international problems of all kinds, and, most importantly, to maintain international peace and security by taking effective collective action for the prevention and removal of the threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression. To that end, the Security Council, the executive body of the United Nations, has been provided with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security to take enforcement action in order to address the threats to the peace and suppress the acts of aggression. In doing so, the Security Council possesses the legitimate authority to make war decisions on behalf of the society of states to enforce its rules, to protect its values, and to achieve its purpose. This concept of a legitimate war extends to war waged in self-defense or collective defense against aggression, but not beyond it. War is today, as sixty years ago when the Charter was ratified, legitimate only as an enforcement measure taken or sanctioned by the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security, or as an exercise of a self- and collective defense against an aggressor on the part of an individual state, and a group of states respectively.

**Means**

Despite the fact that war is no longer deemed to be a legitimate and proportionate means for resolving international disputes, war is not a fading social practice of international politics. It still performs the functions described above. War is still a valuable instrument of policy, despite the codification of *jus contra bellum* as a primary rule governing the conduct of interstate relations within the society of states, and the fact that the availability of such an option is to the benefit of great powers, and to the detriment of other states, which either do not have necessary capability to wage war, or prefer other means to settle their international disputes. Although the character of wars being fought in the past changed with the end of the Cold War; today the vast majority of wars are rather within states than between them; the interstate war as a continuation of policy by other means is still present, as the Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, the wars between newly independent states of then Yugoslavia, or the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for instance, may demonstrate.

War is also still a means of preserving the balance of power, which has been considered as essential to the survival of the system in the Walzian sense. Although recent wars does not seem to bear this assumption out, there is no certainty that wars, once fought between the United States and the Soviet Union in Vietnam, Caribbean, Africa, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the world during the Cold War struggle, could not be replaced by new ones as a result of the change in distribution of capabilities across states in the system after the end of the Cold War. The war in Afghanistan and Iraq may already point to this direction.

With regard to the war waged on behalf of the society of states, this kind of war is also not vanishing. After the Cold War the United Nations, or more appropriately, the
Security Council, became increasingly active in addressing international threats. With the mandate of the Security Council, the society of states repelled the aggression against Kuwait, intervened in North and South Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Kosovo, East Timor, Democratic Republic of Congo and other places to protect its common values and interests.

Clearly, war has an important role in international politics, and despite the fact that it is no longer permitted for a state to use war as an apt and proportionate means for settling international disputes, except for the exercise of the right of self-defense and the collective action of the United Nations, war is still present in intrastate relations and still plays a vital role in the maintenance of international order and the promotion of the common values and interests of the society of states as whole, occasional breaks of its rules notwithstanding.

References


2 The term proposed by Bull in what he considered a group of states that primarily pursue their own interest but, at one and the same time, recognize certain common interests, values and rules; a form of society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by these interest, values and rules in their relations with one another. See ibid., pp. 65—74.


6 See ibid., p. 183.