
War and Diplomatic History

The Second World War is the most significant event in the history of U.S. foreign relations. It accomplished what Woodrow Wilson believed, mistakenly, had already occurred through the Spanish-American War (to use its conventional designation), namely, to push the United States irrevocably into the world of great powers, indeed making it the most powerful of the only two that now really counted geopolitically as such powers. The Second World War was also the most extensive and successful mobilization of the nation as a whole, generating a massive output by a capitalist machine that was being reconstructed under state auspices, thus reestablishing confidence in a system whose credentials had come into question during the devastating Depression. While other powers suffered (none more so than the Soviet Union), the United States remained remote from the sites of war and witnessed a boom that was as unexpected as it was astonishing, propelling the country into economic pre-eminence in the postwar world. No single event, simply put, has changed the geopolitical position of the United States in the world to the extent that did the Second World War.

And yet this monumentally important moment or epoch has proved to be of very limited interest to diplomatic historians. It is now conceivably the case, for example, that the colonial war known here a century ago as the Phillipine Incident is receiving greater scholarly attention – rightly or not – than the (nearly) global conflagration at midcentury. It would be wrong, however, to imagine this lack of concern as a story of decline and fall from some putative golden age. Relative neglect, if that is indeed the proper term, is in fact not a recent phenomenon. One scans in vain the classical tomes of diplomatic history for anything remarkable by way of substance, analysis, or even unusual attention devoted to the world-historical conflict in question. Peruse, for example, the fifth edition (1965) of Samuel Flagg Bemis's *A Diplomatic History of the United States* and you will find about twenty-five pages out of more than a thousand devoted to "American Diplomacy During the Second World War," as the relevant and not especially exiting chapter is called. Thomas Bailey, on his part, spends approximately thirty pages out of nine hundred in the seventh edition (1964) of *A Diplomatic History of the American People*. Notably, his fifth edition (1955) had given almost as much space to the Korean War. This is impressionistic evidence but I would hazard the guess that the high mark of scholarly work on the Second

World War is of comparatively recent origin, distinctive not only against the present “decline” but against the historiography of diplomacy overall.

Listlessness here is a product of both contingent and structural factors. Significance notwithstanding, the Second World War exhibits among U.S. wars a historic peculiarity that tends to make it analytically invisible, as it were. On the structural level, meanwhile, the absence of interest can be accounted for in a radical manner: war *as such* is not a proper object of inquiry in diplomatic history, for war is the end of diplomacy, the history of which must thus be about something else. In elucidating, elaborating, and revising these two arguments, especially the second one, my subsequent remarks will necessarily take on an abstract air here and there, for what interests me, above all, is the conceptual conditions under which an object such as the Second World War may appear in the field of diplomatic history and the explanatory effects that occur when it does. This involves, in turn, tricky issues having to do with periodization. Diplomatic history, to anticipate matters, is predicated on an initial division of time into two kinds of periods, war and peace, the latter of which is then subjected to further investigation and periodization. The distinction between war and peace, one might say, is the premise of the whole exercise but not its content. Yet we have learned since 1945 that war is less of a transhistorical phenomenon and less of a self-evident period than it seems. I will argue that the Second World War constitutes a break in the whole structure of “war”; that it is a moment in which the older European concept of a sharp distinction between war and peace is attenuated; that the central reason for the transformation is the U.S. entry into the conflict; and that war consequently becomes a different object of analysis, all of which then also puts into question what a history of diplomacy might be about. The essay, perhaps overambitiously, will be at once procedural (on periodization and explanation), substantial (in making concrete historical arguments), and demonstrative (in exemplifying one modest way of breaking with the confines of established practices).

I will begin, then, by asking why the Second World War is hard to see. The immediate answer is obvious, indeed almost a platitude. The Second World War was a popular war and so it has remained. *Ipsa facto*, not a great deal of controversy attaches to it. Across the political spectrum, among the public and historians alike, it was and is a deeply legitimate war against very bad regimes bent on destroying by colossal aggression an existing order that, whatever its faults, was certainly worth defending. No serious scholar argues that a fascist victory would have been a good thing and it is hard to argue that the United States should not have become involved. To be sure, there are controversies. One may quarrel about the entry into the war, about (say) Roosevelt’s manner of maneuvering the country into a position where, arguably, war with Japan became inevitable. One may quarrel about the discrepancies between the official posture of a democratic war and the actual conduct with regard to race and related aspects, as revealed in the egregious internment of Japanese Americans. One may quarrel with the framing, execution, and strategic view of

the conflict. One may certainly quarrel over the vision of the Grand Alliance. And one may quarrel very hotly indeed about all things atomic. But regarding the heart of the matter, the actual war against fascism as such, there is and can be little controversy.

The Second World War is historically unique in this respect. Perhaps the Revolutionary War is comparable; but insurrectionary violence to create a Republic is of a different order from that of a war conducted in the name of an already existing regime. Every other war (conventional ones from the War of 1812 down to the Gulf War and all the Amerindian wars) has been contestable on grounds that it was either unnecessary, morally wrong, or politically imprudent – or all of the above. The effort to crush fascism was none of these things. The room, accordingly, for historiographical disagreement of the elementary kind is rather narrow. The various historiographies on the formerly fascist side illustrate the difference most starkly: wrenching questions of national responsibility for aggression and murder on levels of unfathomable magnitude.

The uncontested nature of the war is also, one should add, what has opened it up recently for heroic memorialization. There has been relentless popular botany in sundry aspects of the war. Perhaps this is not surprising. War, after all, is a matter of life and death, a matter of existence itself; and, the Second World War (along with the Civil War), because of the massive commitment of the entire body politic, offers an inexhaustible source of epic tales. This is not incompatible with genuine knowledge; but at its most extravagant and uncritical, such remembrance has turned into serialized odes to the selflessly sacrificing generation, the generation that, after suffering the crushing decade of Depression, was confronted with global war and rose stirringly to the occasion, thus saving civilization in general and the United States in particular, after which said generation was able (one might imagine) to enjoy a well-deserved moment of the good life in the suburban 1950s, only to be faced with a tragically misconceived war and a lot of ungrateful, countercultural protesters in the 1960s. The implicit or not so implicit counterpoint to the good war is thus the bad war, which is to say Vietnam, distinct as it is not only for having been lost but also (and this is the decisive dimension) for having occasioned profound dissent across the land of the free about the very goodness of “America” itself. Memorializing the good war cleanses the body politic from lingering memories of the bad war and its attendant ills.

I am exaggerating a bit but the larger point is important. What makes the Second World War available to popular memory is conversely what renders it less compelling for scholarly analysis. For what drives diplomatic history in the United States is political controversy. Without it, the field has no direction, no character, no shape or form, no vivacity. This central feature is ultimately grounded in the fact that any analysis of the relationship to the outside world puts into question the very identity of the United States as an entity and a project. One might object that this is true of all countries. Yet the ideology of exceptionalism and the constant obsession with the world-historical role of the

United States (indeed the very idea of the nation *as* a project) has served to accentuate in extraordinarily profound ways the meaning of the borderline, the meaning of the foundational distinction between inside and outside. To have an account of any given question of foreign policy is by implication to have an account of what the United States is and ought to be. It is to take a personal position on a certain political terrain. To see this dynamic more plainly, one may consider a counterexample conveniently near to hand: Sweden. Neutrality, lack of great-power aspirations, and not a single war during two centuries has constricted the scope for historical interest in the history of foreign relations. One can only write about the extent to which neutrality was more or less successfully carried out – though this compact, sometimes smug, consensus has now begun to break down against the backdrop of entirely new geopolitical conditions within the variable space called “Europe.” Political controversy, then, is inescapably what generates interest in the history of U.S. diplomacy and its individual episodes. The Second World War as antifascism was necessity and it is hard to argue with necessity.

The preceding comments, a sociology of knowledge of sorts, can account for a certain absence of historiographical exploration, but they offer no conceptual reason to neglect the period as a period. Thus, we should return to my opening thesis (or hypothesis) that war has no place in diplomatic history; and, by extension, that neglect of the Second World War is no neglect at all but quite legitimate exclusion. For the beginning of war is the end of diplomacy, as war is the continuation of politics by overtly violent means. War is thus, bluntly put, of no interest to historians of diplomacy. More precisely, it is of interest only as a problem of diplomatic failure or impending peace. Small wonder, then, that historians have been inclined to analyze the Second World War either as the end of the sorry 1930s or the beginning of what is usually referred to as the Cold War.

A brief sketch of the historical background of this argument is useful before we go on. War and peace, as they were defined by conventional European rules after the seventeenth century, are two mutually exclusive states of state affairs, clearly demarcated and officially acknowledged. A precondition here is the prior demarcation of the state itself as a territory of clear borders and absolute internal sovereignty, mutually recognized by every other member of the system. This new formation had emerged, in part, to eliminate as rightful grounds for warfare, within and between states, the appeals to supranational principles – quelling, in effect, politically debilitating disputes over Christianity. Thus, in due course, the state was turned into its own justification and legitimating principle; and to complement the transformation there emerged a kind of technology of statecraft, in which warfare and diplomacy were now two instruments of some larger policy (or grand strategy) designed to maintain and expand the security and well-being of the state *qua* state. Hence diplomacy became the legal and historical obverse of war, the promulgation of the national interest by peaceful means, mainly in the form

of negotiation and bargaining – negotiation being, figuratively speaking, the equivalent of battle. On closer inspection, the relation turns out to be more complicated. While the outbreak of *actual* war spelled the end of diplomacy, the omnipresent *possibility* of war, the possibility of external state violence on a massive scale, was decisive throughout. Yet as concrete historical moments, war and peace remained distinct.

Analogously, then, diplomatic history eventually became the counterpoint to military history. Inverse mirror images, they are constitutionally grounded in the same, sharp distinction. Thus, the discursive place of war in diplomatic history is typically located around the condensing couplet origins/consequences.¹ How this operates to squeeze out war itself can be gauged by another example taken from from Bailey's revealing brick: the First World War warrants no individual chapter at all, as the account moves directly from "The Road to World War" to "Negotiating the Treaty of Versailles." An event can only become an event here because it something that leads to war or because it is a phase of the negotiated end of war. The difference between the historiography of the Second World War and Bailey's prototype is merely that, while the "road to war" is similarly present, the expected analogue of Versailles becomes the nonevent that produces the long permutation or interregnum in international relations known as the Cold War. Had the Second World War been exceedingly controversial, then, the scholarly focus would have stayed on causes and effects rather than the war itself. For diplomacy and its history pertain preponderantly to foreign relations as they are played out in a state of peace.

This view may be challenged on several grounds, but I will restrict myself to two. The first and most obvious is that even the most conventional war usually entails simultaneous diplomacy vis-à-vis allied and neutral powers, a whole range of moves that falls squarely within the domain of diplomatic history proper. Such is the central terrain of Warren Kimball's extensive work on the Second World War, a string of peerless studies of Roosevelt and (in the main) Anglo-American diplomacy. What happened diplomatically, in that limited and strict sense, was crucial for the conduct of the war and in deciding the geopolitical future of vast parts of the globe, sometimes literally on the back of the proverbial envelope. Moreover, the absence of any comprehensive peace settlement left contentious issues stemming directly from those wartime decisions, issues in some instances still outstanding. A cursory perusal of current front pages, featuring the division of Korea and the Japanese-Russian border conflict, is sufficient to see the force of this point.

1. Here, diplomatic history is generally at one with the corresponding subfield in political science known as "international relations," which is also uninterested in war itself as opposed to its origins and consequences. Otherwise there is little in common since international relations aims as to determine in antihistorical ways the answer to the ahistorical question "why do states do what they do," a rather futile exercise.

To ignore the historical situatedness of these wartime dealings is evidently a mistake. The diplomacy of war, as it might be called, seems thus to constitute a period in its own right and ought to be studied accordingly. What does it mean, however, to analyze such a period “in its own right”? The initial response is very likely a minimal, negative injunction: the moment must not be reduced to some mere prologue to the Cold War, moved into the background as a staging prop for, so to speak, more important things. One must not, in other words, fall for the common inclination to consider the past as mere *origin* of the present, the procedure according to which the present is seen as a germ in the past and so the identification of the germinating aspect comes to constitute the explanatory scheme. A crude example of such a teleology is the tracing of something called the Western tradition from the Greeks onward and upward, where every significant moment from then on is understood and analyzed only as another stage in a continuous movement of “the West” toward its final fulfillment. The end, in both senses of the word, determines the beginning. What does not fit the end is consigned to the rubbish bin of failure, marginality, contingency, error: in short, that which is without historical interest and importance. A similar procedure is at work in writing the Second World War simply as the “origin of the Cold War.” This is to wreak genuine violence on the historicity of the former: one seeks to find those elements of the war that already contain within them the essentials of the ensuing conflict, all in order to contrive a simple, sequential type of explanation.

Such a methodological trap has been subjected to a range of critiques. Nietzsche’s genealogy remains perhaps the most powerful: “the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it.”² Instead of looking for precursors, then, one might articulate the conditions of possibility for the appearance of what seems self-evident, conditions that are contingent in that they are products of historically unrepeatable circumstances, yet also conjuncturally (over)determined. This is how I have tried (I emphasize “tried”) to use Franklin D. Roosevelt in my delineation of the concept of the Cold War. In situating the Second World War as a worldwide need to obliterate fascist lawlessness, Roosevelt played on the language of the Civil War, the language of freedom and slavery, the language of unconditional surrender. By means of a crucial redeployment of the concept of totalitarianism, Roosevelt’s matrix then becomes available (“taken over, transformed and redirected”) around 1946–47 for the U.S. project known as the Cold War.³ My argument is not a causal one, as conventionally understood, since the reappropriation of Roosevelt’s basic

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (New York, 1969), 77.

3. Cf. Anders Stephanson, “Fourteen Notes on the Very Idea of a Cold War,” in *Rethinking Geopolitics*, ed. G. O’Tuathail and S. Dalby (New York, 1999), 62–85. The Notes were originally written for *H-Diplo* and appeared during May–June 1996.

concepts is only one ingredient in a conjuncture of unrepeatable circumstances. It is at once contingent and structurally determined (because Roosevelt's language is of course in some sense distinctly "American"). In short, the analysis is an effort to pinpoint what allowed the Cold War conceptually to appear as truth and eventually something self-evident. Roosevelt's framing is analyzed in relation to what followed but not inherently as the Cold War to-be. As so many others, I happened to be more interested in the emergence of the Cold War – my own formative experience of the self-evident – than in the dynamics of the Second World War. As there are no absolute origins, however, I had to ask myself how Roosevelt (and Henry Stimson) came to use that particular frame, how it became available to them at that particular moment. The Second World War then becomes not a prologue but an episode of sorts.

Whatever the genealogical credentials of this line of inquiry, it is still situated within a Cold War problematic; it is not, positively, a study of what was historically distinct about the diplomacy of war. But the remarks about Roosevelt's contextualization of the war already point to one difficulty in that regard. There is something about the very stratospheric altitude of wartime diplomacy that limits what one can do with it, at least on the U.S. side. One can spend a lifetime trying to figure out if there is any there there in the interior of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The extreme privacy of his wartime dealings is inversely related to the extreme maximalism of his ideological framing of the war (unconditional surrender coupled with the four freedoms and so on), a polarity that opened up the space, domestically, for the overwhelming emphasis on efficient warfare, on creating beneath the vast political generalities a fantastically powerful war machine to obliterate the enemy. The displacement of geopolitical issues in the name of present war and future freedom narrows the spectrum of retrospective analysis; neither diplomacy, nor military execution really lends itself to much geopolitical reflection.⁴ Hence the proclivity to fold the political aspect into some more basic context such as, say, "the American way of war" or "identity and difference in the U.S. conception of the outside world."

All of which anticipates the second major objection to the main thesis: if war is understood along the given Clausewitzian lines as a political *means*, it ought to be the case that the framing of military strategy, its priorities, targets, and methods, will be affected by some deeper (geo)political logic or grand strategy. The moment has thus come to examine in what sense the Second World War represents, as I have claimed, a decisive shift in the place of war and peace in international relations, or, to put it differently, the degree to which the arrival of the United States onto center stage served to negate and transform the Clausewitzian matrix I used as a shorthand for the European order. For what

4. Compare Gabriel Kolko, who once talked with such forcefulness, about a "politics of war," a broader, more comprehensive concept than "diplomacy." Yet even Kolko's famous work begins in 1943, when the war had turned and the organization of liberated territories had commenced, when political arrangements on the ground no longer could be evaded.

arrived here was not just any Great Power but a superpower: a power that saw itself, quite literally, as above (and beyond).

A cursory return to the issue of war as a period will serve to open the argument. Historians are in the business of periodization. They chop temporality up into parts according to one principle or another, postulating the change of something over time and assuming that the object of history is to clarify how and why there is such change – or, as the case may be, no change. Some historians are interested in breaks and discontinuities, others in characterizing the essential nature of what they identify, accordingly, as a “period.” Diplomatic historians genuflect toward the former because of the systemic importance of the crisis in international relations, the always existing risk of a breakdown and eventual war. The premise of periodization overall is indeed the idea of continuity and discontinuity, a binary that is ontologically suspect in that the latter, in positing an originary unity, may be parasitical on the former; whereas in the beginning was perhaps only difference and dispersal. I will gladly dispense with any further consideration of that problem; but periodization, it must nevertheless be said, does tend to infuse an unwarranted totality on any given slice of time. Not only is the naming of periods notoriously a normative exercise, the very act of naming tends to confer an essential nature on them. The Second World War, however, seems not to be a particularly difficult case in any of these respects. As names go, it is relatively neutral and descriptive. It appears, of course, under other, more “situated” designations in many places, designations that are part of sharp controversies about responsibility and dating. One might wonder, too, about which “world” it really was, whether it was perhaps not the world of the northern hemisphere, indeed whether the world of the preceding war implicitly present in the naming did not really take place in something even smaller. Finally, there is the problem if it was in fact one war or (at least) two, an Asian and a European one. Depending on the answer, one might well come up with two different starting dates. As far as the United States is concerned, however, the Second World War looks like a fairly well defined period, replete with a clear beginning and end. The sense, too, in which this war – this period – was in fact a war is not in doubt. It was all-out war. The significant aspect lies elsewhere. It has to do with the aforementioned framing and purpose: to eradicate fascist criminality, all in the name of “unconditional surrender.” These were no more the terms of classical geopolitics than were they mere Rooseveltian whimsy. Even if the U.S. entry into the Second World War was “normal” in that it was officially declared, the orientation expressed in Roosevelt’s frame was hard to reconcile with the precepts of international relations, as traditionally conceived and practiced. A brief digression about this discrepancy is now necessary.

The U.S. attitude toward the European system of international relations had always been problematic: surface acceptance amid relative geopolitical seclusion, punctuated by erratic and limited participation. One reason for this variance was that the United States, far more, incidentally, than the Soviet

Union, was (and is) a world empire. Like Rome, it is in principle the world, or the world to be.⁵ There is an outside, to be sure, but it is intrinsically not an equal (equality between recognized states having been the basic principle of the European order). The outside is either evil or simply undifferentiated, amorphous mass to be acted upon in some manner or other. Hence, “America” is not, and never can be, one among many powers; and so it can never really embrace any truly international order either. While the idea of a league or united front of nations may be appealing, the actuality always turns out to be a disappointment as it falls short of being the United States; and so there opens up an irreducible gap between the world empire, on the one hand, as the embodiment of the universal principles of humanity (to use Wilson’s formulation), and, on the other, its supposed reflection in the actual world. The World Court offers an interesting historical illustration: as “American” a project as one can imagine, yet invariably castigated as “un-American” (that is, anti-world) when it tries to expand jurisdiction over that part of the actually existing world which is the United States.

What concerns me here is not the reasons for this posture but the manner in which it situates the phenomenon of war and what happened in that context with regard to the Second World War. It stands to reason that war can scarcely be grasped as a simple instrument of statecraft and grand strategy. It cannot be legitimate for any recognized regime in the system to employ it just because one happens to consider it profitable. Indeed, the whole idea and machinery of statecraft itself is an improper, or at least suspect, way of being toward the world, for that world is “naturally” one of discussion, juridical principles, and autonomous economic exchange. Grand strategy, within this structure, is ineradicably a sign of the old and corrupt European state system that had produced war in the first place. War, in short, is rendered effectively illegitimate, except as a kind of *anti-war*. It can typically be launched only as one of two things: either in drastically maximalistic terms as a crusade to end all wars or, more frequently, as policing operations designed to punish perceived criminality and transgressions against an always already existing natural order of law and norms. Crusading and policing may be understood here as integral moments of a larger legitimating story of moving history along to its end, when the natural and the normal will everywhere reign supreme. All U.S. wars, at least after 1898, have thus entailed the idea of punishing opponents who have committed something illegitimate, if not downright illegal.

This was the background of Roosevelt’s conceptualization of the Second World War as liquidation of incorrigible gangster regimes and, in the greater scheme of things, a crucial part of the eternal struggle to preserve liberty against the enslaving subjugators of humankind. The principle of law and order was connected up with the more fundamental principle of global freedom as the

5. Cf Otto Hintze’s formulation in his *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York, 1975), 468. Rome, it should be said, understood “the world” as that which mattered.

end of history, an eschatological narrative according to which there could be no security for anyone until the very last slave master on earth had been wiped out and freedom triumphed. This was not exactly a “traditional” message and so the disjunctions between the U.S. conception of the world and the older European order came to the fore (Wilson’s First World War had been a dress rehearsal). It is ironic, however, that Roosevelt himself combined this quintessentially “American” perspective with a far more European vision of a postwar concert of regional policemen in which the United States would be one of a foursome and in that sense unexceptional, continuous with the world rather than embodying it. Roosevelt’s unorthodoxy here, very much in the spirit of his predecessor Theodore, was nonetheless pitched in a minor key, premised as it was on a pious hope that realities would somehow turn out well enough to allow redescription in domestic terms. When, after 1945, this proved not to be the case, the usable parts of Roosevelt’s frame were predictably the larger “American” ones, now recast in aggressively exceptionalist ways – leader of the free world, etc., etc.

The result was a curious amalgam in which the ambiguities were suspended, or encapsulated, within the Cold War against communism, a war that was metaphorical at the crusading level but very real indeed in the realm of policing. Essential aspects of the old European order remained intact, such as the principle of sovereignty: proliferating new “states” in the last decade or so are eloquent testimony to its continued role as the criterion of international identity and participatory eligibility. Yet the system overall was reordered because of the U.S. quest for supremacy. What enabled this conceptually to take place was the appropriation of Roosevelt’s new, maximalistic notion of “security” – for security in that sense could accommodate older forms of *realpolitik*, narrowly conceived policies of “national interest,” within a larger narrative of universal right, globalism, and indispensable leadership. Anywhere and anything was now, in principle, within the field of action. War, specifically, tended to be sheriff operations. Not a single war since 1945 has been officially declared. Not a single one of them, that is, has been a proper war according to traditional conventions. Korea was explicitly defined as a police move. Vietnam was counterinsurgency against “subversion,” military aid as it were, before it was turned militarily into another Korea. The Gulf War was punishment of a “rogue state” (one, let it be said, that had committed illegitimate acts of war even by the older European standards). These have been acts of “pacification” and punishment, maintaining law and order within a larger context of defending “the free world” against slavery. Such undeclared, limited wars to punish transgressors bear a superficial similarity to older European wars of suppressing colonial disorders, but policing in the historical service of (U.S.) freedom is something quite different. The normative excess, so to speak, makes the operations vulnerable to savage criticism unless they happen to be short, surgical, and utterly successful. For what is at stake is not the security of the limited theater in question but (one can always argue at home) the future of the universe. If,

as in Vietnam, the limited war drags out and shades of grey begin to appear, the whole grand narrative might indeed come into dispute. More to the point, such exercises cannot be grasped as the opposite of diplomacy. On the contrary, as the qualitative distinction between war and peace is erased or at least blurred, policing goes beyond simple repression to become a means of political pressure, even a form of diplomacy perhaps.⁶

Neither war, nor peace, was thus what it used to be. Diplomatic history, meanwhile, found amid the infinities of Cold War policy that its object of inquiry was losing fixtude and clarity. A seemingly endless crisis ensued. The extent of it was obscured by the very political ferocity generated by the revisionist challenge. A diplomatic retrospective of the Second World War, in any case, was now hard to write for it required temporary suspension of Cold War urgencies and the recovery of a kind of war that no longer existed. The case here, not surprisingly, will then turn out to be a plea not so much for a return to what was but for a wider reflection on how, for example, the transformations of war and peace have pertained to international relations in general and the United States in particular. Such a history may include comparative investigations of the place of war in state formation. Apart from the work of such iconoclastic world historians as William McNeill, the most interesting analyses along these lines have appeared within historical sociology. This scholarly current, emanating chiefly from Max Weber and, beyond him, nineteenth-century German historiography on the state, always foregrounds war (and the preparation for war) in the emergence of state and society. Historical sociologists such as Charles Tilly and Michael Mann connect this formative aspect to changes in mode of production, classes, technology, and norms, as military power and its uses occur within any given social formation.⁷ The current vogue, in another register, for “culture” may well be supplemented by investigations into the history of law and its peculiar status. As the judicial aftermath of the Second World War showed at Nuremberg, there is a fascinating and engtangled history of the U.S. relationship to international law and the whole idea of legal procedure, not least when it comes to war. Meanwhile, none of this is of course to argue that one should not engage in the most exquisitely traditional investigations of those rarefied diplomatic moments when the future of huge tracts of land and matters of life and death are decided by a few men, very few men, in the highest of places.

6. Consider the recent attack on rump Yugoslavia: a computer war conceived as a combination of policing and diplomacy. Another development, incidentally, that has served to dissolve the older Clausewitzian constellation is the enormous expansion of the visual and cultural domain, which has blurred the boundaries of what constitutes power, influence, and policy in times of “peace,” indeed, the whole domain of politics as such.

7. Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton, 1994), is, however, a useful corrective to excessive emphasis on war in the emergence of the modern state system.