

By Professor Yuan Zhang

External conflicts revise the view of war in the Middle East

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International



Throughout human history, major international wars have not only caused dramatic short-term fluctuations in interstate relations, but have also had a long and profound impact on the way non-combatant states view war. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is rapidly changing the global geopolitics and the world political and economic order.

The study of war is to prevent it

War studies is an important branch of international political studies. It is an important mission of political science scholars to use research findings to provide answers on how to prevent the outbreak of war. Unfortunately, research that reveals the causes of war is easily dismissed by skeptics because the reality of the war process is always full of variables and uncertainties. Without sifting through time, it is difficult for researchers to collect comprehensive documentation of the war, and to derive truly objective conclusions about the nature of war. Therefore, it is more meaningful and operational to focus on research to prevent wars from happening.

Disarmament, pacifism and the international institutions' negotiation are more popular directions of war study due to the general desire to live in peace and the universal critique of unjust war.

War combines typical elements of times

Whether examining war itself or exploring the path to peace, the objects of both war and peace has the clear topicality. Warfare analysis emphasis weaponry, geography, and military organization, all of which must include the environmental variable of development level.

As for the state' perspective of waging war or not, its view of war is directly related to the state power and to the global distribution of that power. It means that the power factor, including the perception of power, is directly concerned with the outbreak of war and with the intensity of war.

While ambition for more power is central to the occurrence of war, the real-time cause of the outbreak of war is state's optimistic attitude. The judgment that waging war is profitable leads the state to be unafraid of the risks of war. Optimism implies a series of predictions: a prediction of the superiority of the state's power; a prediction that the government can mobilize domestic forces; a prediction of the government's ability to control domestic resources; a prediction that the war can be ended in a short time; and a prediction that the opponent will be conquered easily.

In retrospect, failed war waging is basically the result of overconfidence and misplaced optimism of the country's leaders.

What dramatic external conflict changes the view of war in the Middle Eastern

First, external conflict shocks the state's trade-off attitude toward waging war.

On one hand, Middle Eastern countries are trying to avoid "misplaced optimism" in large-scale wars; on the other hand, they do not reject confidence in power politics in small-scale conflicts. For example, Israel's military strikes against Syria are routinized, and Turkey's cross-border strikes against Kurdish forces have not been suspended due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The logic behind not abandoning small-scale military confrontation is that large-scale external military wars can overshadow international attention to low-intensity violent conflicts within the Middle East area.

Second, external conflicts have pushed Middle Eastern states to be clearer about what to stockpile and what to avoid in terms of war prevention preparations.

There are no other big powers joined the war. Middle Eastern countries have recognized the need to abandon expectations that the "liberal" world will intervene war effectively and directly in this era. It is more crucial that states should strengthen the leadership of their own governments. What's more, every government takes their responsibility in transnational coordination, emphasizing deeper cooperation between neighbor governments in the political, economic, and security spheres, thus strengthening country's comprehensive strength. After all, strengthening the government's power is also a way for the country to mobilize and accumulate superior strength in time when a conflict crisis comes really.

The food security crisis and energy crisis triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict have also made Middle Eastern countries aware of the importance of strategic energy supplies reserves and continuous enrichment of resource.

Finally, given the protract of external conflicts, Middle Eastern countries are likely to be more cautious about preempting wars, i.e., "jumping the gun" to achieve the strategic aims of war. Because almost all modern wars are moving toward a prolonged quagmire, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is no exception. In addition, Middle Eastern countries will probably be more aggressive in signaling their national strength, such as exaggerating their development achievements, in order to confuse potential enemies about the power gap between countries and thus avoid war.

Diplomacy helps resolve security dilemmas

Modern states have always considered the mere emphasis on power structures to be dangerous and harmful. Increased communication and consultation through diplomacy seems to be a better option to deter war. Emphasis on diplomacy means increased transparency, not a requirement that all states follow the cosmopolitan or moralistic foreign policy advocated by the U.S. and the West without close scrutiny.

Wars are costly and no war is profitable for both sides. Successful diplomacy reduces misperceptions and miscalculations, so that preventing countries in the midst of national power shifts from launching preventive attacks for fear of being perceived as a threat by outsiders.

Through quality communication, diplomacy can help boost the confidence of regional states that security agreements or peace deals will be adhered to. Effective diplomacy also contributes to the value of compliance with security agreements or peace deals.

The greater importance of diplomacy for the Middle Eastern is to maintain a level of regional order that allows for autonomy and balance, and to avoid inviting external interfere that might lead to regional instability.

External conflict opens a window of opportunity. There is strategic value in both a view of war that respects realist power theories and a belief that peace diplomacy can discourage large-scale military escalation. Making every effort to avoid the outbreak of war, but having the strength to win it whenever it comes, is the lesson that this external conflict reinforces for all countries.

*Zhang Yuan, Professor, The Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, China

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