

# Revisiting Methodology of Analysis of War as a Social Phenomenon

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**Abstract**—The paper delineates and reveals main approaches to analyzing the essence of war as a social phenomenon in the life of society, in particular, formational, civilizational, culturological, socio-philosophical and others. Understanding the essence and main features of war in the current circumstances hugely increases in importance and enables us to take certain measures to avoid the war. Another important aspect of analyzing war as a phenomenon is evaluation of its generic and specific features which allows finding the common characteristics of war with other social phenomena, such as politics, economy, law, morality and the like, and draw attention to distinguishing characteristics. Common characteristics of war are its generic features, and distinguishing characteristics are its specific features. Together analysis of the essence of war and knowledge about war comprise a certain methodological approach to understanding peculiarities of modern social phenomena and processes. It should be emphasized that methodology of study of war as a social phenomenon could and should be formed and function in accordance with principles of scientifically oriented philosophical system.

**Keywords**—*methodology; essence; analysis; approach; war; formation; civilization; feature; globalization*

*"Define words correctly, and you will relieve the world from half of misunderstandings".*

*Ren éDescartes.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mankind wages wars since time immemorial. Many tried to conceive and eradicate it. But it persists and grows along with enhanced possibilities of the humans. War has many faces and many aspects: it is a distinct shape of the society and social process; a tragedy and business; a game, spectacle and show; a katharsis or a means of saving and purification of the society, and a cause for its degradation; an ignoble affair or noble and holy fight. War can represent both a space for uprush of demonic destructive forces of the universe and occurrence of divine grace, and a liturgical act [1]. War can have the image of a victim and sacrifice, and also rise and fall of states and societies.

It is possible to recite faces of the war endlessly: the important thing that it carries inside itself colossal human,

material and spiritual sacrifices and destruction. Despite all the talk about peace and humanism, 25-30 wars of average size and 400 small wars happened only in 50 years after WWII. They encompassed no less countries than the last World War. More than 40 mln people died and more than 30 mln people became refugees in those wars [2].

Danger and unpredictability of war draws extra attention to it throughout the life of the human being. Hence close scrutiny by scientists from various fields of knowledge. There are very many evaluations of war as a special condition of society. However a question about the essence of war is very complicated. The notion of "war" is used quite widely. Hence differences in understanding of warfare by type: economic, psychological, diplomatic, energetic, informational, "cold", hybrid and so on [3].

## II. ESSENCE OF WAR: A PALETTE OF APPROACHES

What is war? What are its specifics and trends in modern circumstances? What is the difference between armed conflicts involving armed units, use of armed violence, for example, by guerilla warriors, and the war as a special condition of the society and state? What is a sense of armed violence? What steps the society should take to minimize risks of starting a war? Searching for answers to these and other questions emphatically requires analyzing the state of conceptualization of scientific knowledge about war, its essence and particularity of manifestations in modern circumstances [4]. The relevance of this analysis is predetermined by multiple and effective examples of application of civilizational approach in modern circumstances. By combining this approach with sociocultural approach and formational methodology researchers try to understand the essence of war as a sociocultural phenomenon. Today the idea of indispensability of diverse research methods for multidimensional cognition of academic and historical experience became an indisputable truth [5]. Within this context, it appears, civilizational, formational, culturological, modernizational, mental and other analytical resources for cognition of social phenomena must work in a dialogue mode. These methodologically important frameworks form theoretical foundation for approaching correct interpretation of the war phenomenon. In other words, it is necessary not to

counterpose them to each other but instead use syncretically with the aim of building modern theory of warfare pertaining to reality [6].

For example, quite a notable part in explanation of war as a social phenomenon belongs to the formational approach. From the point of view of representatives of this approach (especially classics of Marxism-Leninism) war is violence and ability to conduct violent policy strongly depends on economic might of the state. As a rule, the maker of better weapons wins, all other things being equal. However the ability to make more powerful weapons depends on the level of economy and level of development of productive forces. War as violence is determined by relations of production and the level of economic development of a society. From the perspective of the classics of Marxism-Leninism, when "labouring classes" will become the dominant force of the state — as Chernyshevsky also presumed — "possibility of war will vanish" and new ethical peace will be established [7].

Basically, the representatives of the formational approach deny multi-variance of historical development. The formational approach emasculates historical reality and recognizes unilinear process of societal development; absolutizes dominance of the material over the spiritual. Its explanation of wars and revolutions is rigidly tied to economic factor. All problems of social development are viewed through the prism of class struggle, substituting ethnic, religious, and culturological issues with class struggles. Eventually the formational approach suggests transition from one socio-economic formation to another eliminates the entire superstructure: religion, culture, science, morality, and law. For this reason Marxist ideologists denied religious wars and didn't understand war as conflict of cultures, etc. It is impossible to deeply understand spiritual aspects of military conflicts, development of military capability, and modes of warfare within constraints of the formational "base-superstructure" relationship. Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev was right in this respect, rightfully suggesting that class struggle and class relationships were not the driving force of history and our entire life should be oriented towards specific ideas of a nation and individual rather than abstract class ideas, and the fate of Russia is infinitely more valuable than that of classes, parties, doctrines and schools of thought [8].

Unlike formational approach, representatives of civilizational approach suggest analyzing social processes through the prism of inception, development and demise of local civilizations. History of mankind is a history of local civilizations as an integral system of societal life including culture, values, traditions, philosophy, science, morality, law, religion, way of life and other aspects of human interaction with environment. Each local civilization occupies a certain geographical space containing empires, states, and expatriate communities. It develops according to its own patterns which differ from those of social groups, nations, and states. Local civilizations are tied by various links and contacts between them range from rivalry, conflicts, and war to mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and friendship. Civilizational structure of the world community is

not stable or stationary. It is prone to social tensions, wars, and revolutions. Local civilizations experience changes of inner borders, large-scale migratory movements and armed conflicts.

The civilizational approach to analyzing social processes through the prism of local civilizations provides deeper and more complete understanding of the essence and reasons for starting wars, their character and trends, arrangement of political forces, methods of armed and non-military struggle, and also socioeconomic, political, moral and mental, ecological and other consequences of all types of wars. Thus, according to Berdyaev, the World War I had civilizational character. It was a conflict of different cultures, ethnic groups, religions, justice and ethical systems of the states, belonging to different local civilizations [9].

Does the civilizational approach deny the formational one? They should not be counterposed. They both supplement and enrich each other. That's why both approaches can and should be used together, allowing us to describe any type of war most completely, taking into account not only socioeconomic but mental and cultural aspects of warfare.

Recently the culturological approach was widely used to explain social phenomena including war. This approach is based on realization of culture as a condition for development, stimulus, and practical mental foundation of evolution of various social phenomena [10].

The culturological approach suggests using a range of methodological practices for scrutinizing the phenomenon of culture as pivotal in understanding and explaining the phenomenon of war, human being and society as subjects of warfare. According to the logic of this approach, various aspects of the essence of war as an object of culture (nature, genesis, ontological foundations, faces and character, types, spirituality) are understood inside a certain hierarchy as facets of comprehensive sociocultural phenomenon. Ultimately, it is a study of cultural content of social reality, both existing and evolving cultural programs, realized in practical experiences of people [11]. In particular, Russian philosopher V.S. Solovyov analyzed problems of war from the standpoint of cultural and moral judgment. War, in his opinion, is not only a sociopolitical phenomenon but also — and even primarily — a phenomenon of cultural and spiritual sphere of life, the most poignant manifestation of spiritual conflict of different cultures. For him, sameness of history of mankind and history of wars represented "the chronic malady of mankind". Both sources of wars and governing conditions for their elimination Solovyov connected first of all with moral and spiritual sphere of life [12]. These ideas were further developed by representatives of Russian philosophical thought N.A. Berdyaev, I.A. Ilyin, E.N. Trubetzkoy and others.

Considering how diverse and multifaceted are evaluation of war, it is necessary to perform philosophical analysis of war which includes two parts. The first part studies war from the point of view of fundamental interests of its participants as well as interests of other agents. Worldview approach to study of war cannot be accepted as strictly scientific because

it is subjective and reflects intentions of opposing warring parties which never coincide. Evaluations of war made by other countries — allied to one of the warring parties — will also be contradictory or "averaged" because in this case too war will be comprehended and evaluated in the light of positions of opposing sides [13].

Study of war from the worldview and philosophical standpoint can coincide with the truth of war, especially on the side of the state under attack. Truth about war is close to scientific evaluation of war, but some aspects of it can be "justifiably" ideologized. That's why people need scientific and philosophical study of war which comprises the second part of cognition of war from the position of objectivity and impartiality. Both parts are necessary in the process of cognition of war. Cumulative knowledge about war can be studied comparatively and used as a basis for better explanation of this complex social phenomenon [14].

The essence of war can be understood on the basis of substantiation of attributive, essential features of war. Together they allow formulate ontological definition of war. The definition of war according to essential features is more scientific than definition according to elements of its content [15]. The essence of war was brought to light throughout thousands of years. Only during transition from XVIII to XIX century philosophers started to pay permanent attention to inseparability of two aspects of war — state policy and armed violence. Toward that time state policies, and also methods and means of armed violence reached high levels of sophistication. Their interaction in the phenomenon of war started to become definitive element in the phenomenon of war, and it was impossible not to notice.

Modern warfare is a qualitatively new phenomenon, and analyzing it requires reworking the established concepts of the evolution of society and refining of the conceptual framework. Modern definition of war says that it is a particular condition of the society which manifests itself in conducting (continuing) policies of a state (coalition of states) with the use of armed forces and other military structures of the state, and also armed formations within the society. This definition reflects the essence of war which is inseparable from the state policy and using armed forces for solving issues of national importance. It is necessary to emphasize that emergence of new agents of war and policy is a stable trend today. Those include transnational corporations and transnational banks. Their activities are global in nature and they aim at establishing new world order in their own interests with the help of private military companies.

### III. FEATURES OF WAR

Characterizing generic and specific features of war is an important aspect of social and philosophical analysis of war as a special phenomenon of the society. Their substantiation helps to find common features of war and other phenomena of the society and to focus attention on distinguishing features. Common features of war are generic features, and distinguishing features are its specific characteristics. Thus, way of life of the society is a generic feature of war. War is a phenomenon of the society and life of people. It relates first

of all to life of the society during peacetime. Since the time of first wars in the history of mankind and existence of various cultures until the second half of the XX century wars were seen as acceptable and efficient method of solving important problems of life of the society and state. War as a social phenomenon also relates to politics, economy, morals, law, artistic, aesthetical, and informational life of the society [16]. In common with them, war has such generic features as ambiguity, determinacy by natural and social processes, activities of people, development, interconnectivity with other structural elements of society, possibility of multifaceted manifestations of its role in history, etc.

In order to determine the character and content of modern and future wars, and also development trends for the tools of armed struggle and military art, and to build national defense policy we need futurological analysis based on analysis of previous wars and outlines of the future [17]. Most military theorists agree on one thing: wars of new era will not be similar to wars of the past. They emphasize that the most likely wars in the foreseeable future will be local, separate military conflicts, and also hybrid wars, combining both traditional and unconventional modern technologies of warfare.

### IV. CONCLUSION

War is a highly multifaceted phenomenon, difficult for analysis. However, knowledge of main approaches to discovering its essence, contents, typology and laws helps to prepare researchers to conduct their activities in complex social conditions despite fickle nature of aggressive manifestations of modern war. That's why in this context it is necessary to concentrate main efforts for development of Russia on creating modern integrated national war science. Socio-humanitarian knowledge should play an important role as a methodological base for researching war as a social phenomenon.

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