Introduction: From Sarajevo to Sarajevo, the USS Oklahoma to Oklahoma City

"You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." This quotation, ascribed by some to Leon Trotsky and others to Leo Tolstoy, is very popular among historians of war. I admit I've used it myself in my more irritable moments, not just in texts but with friends and students alike. Why is it so seductive a ... story? Several reasons are clear. First, these are very confusing times when it comes to war. From domestic terrorism to nuclear war the range of contemporary war is boggling—and baffling. Second, war's restless energy, its almost palpable agency, are also clear in this little bon mot. War isn't just something that humans make, it is.

Or is it? Explaining what makes war possible is one of the two great goals of this book. Well, perhaps that is putting it optimistically. Perhaps telling several intertwined stories about how war works would be more realistic—and quite sufficient. The second main goal of this book is to specifically explain, in part, why war has become the confusion it is now and to shed some light on what we can expect in the future. I am convinced that there are ways to explain contemporary war. The best of these stories are grounded in careful attention to what we can know of history. The cloudy mirror of the future is a reflection and projection of the past. This explains my emphasis on history. Too many theorists of contemporary war are unfamiliar with the long twisted tale of war itself.

So this is the story of war today, in reference to what war has been and dreams of what it will be. The rest is just elaboration. The postmodern theory, the medieval history, the arcana of high-tech weaponry and even the exegesis
Introduction

of official infowar doctrines are all just ways of mapping this tale—the most useful mappings for me, although I hope you too will find some helpful, dear reader. War is a living text, after all, and we are all of us bound into it, of it, even as we tell our parts, as it writes our future.

First World, ha, ha, ha!
   —Popular chant at the pro-Zapatista rally
   in Mexico City, March 1994

Here we are, the dead of all times, dead again, but now
to live!
   —Zapatista communique, January 1994

One history of our century is the simple, sad story of 1914 to 1995—Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through this lens all of modern Western history, a thousand years, could be perceived in the tortuous tale of this city with its incomplete colonializations, its shifting governments, its interminable ethnic, religious, imperial, and ideological wars. Certainly the “sameness” of it all is horrifying. This is true as well if one looks around the world, a few short years since the end of the all-defining capitalist-communist conflict. Then the many wars around the world were understood to be part of this great Manichaean struggle for the future of civilization: red versus red, white, blue. Now the Cold War is won, and yet wars proliferate all the same. And now, without the Cold War framework, these wars are revealed to be in many respects nightmares out of the past: Balkan and Transcaucasian wars of rape, murder, ethnic cleansings, and occupation; tribal wars in Africa and Southwest Asia; brutal repressions and peasant rebellions in Central and South America; Amerindian uprisings in Ontario, the Amazon, Chiapas; nationalistic terrorism in Europe and Asia; oil wars in the Middle East; and extremist (religious and ideological) terror in Japan gas attacks and U.S. fertilizer bombs; fundamentalism in state power in parts of Africa and Asia; religious strife everywhere.

Samuel Huntington has been so struck by this proliferation of ancient conflicts and hatreds that he now posits that the wars of the future will be caused by the “Clash of Civilizations,” the model being, one supposes, the ancient world of Rome and perhaps the Crusades as well.

But is it so simple? Despite the disconcerting continuity between many contemporary conflicts and ancient, brutal quarrels, any close observer will also note gaping discontinuities. There are some very new and unique aspects to war today that represent a tremendous break from war’s history and also point to war’s possible futures.

Let us look at some details.
Introduction

Within the next 20 years it is highly probable that there will be the use of nuclear weapons in a regional and/or terrorist conflict. The proliferation of nuclear technology and the tenacity of war culture make this a very safe prediction. Not only will nuclear weapons continue to proliferate, but ballistic missiles will as well (Nolan and Wheelon, 1990). It is also just as likely that there will be at least one major use of chemical or biological weapons. As small nations and nation-wanna-bes seek access to these "poor man" weapons of mass destruction, already being deployed domestically in Japan, the major powers continue to perfect them (Pringle, 1993; Wright, 1993). The underlying issue here, and the driving dynamic of contemporary war, is the proliferation of military technologies.

The growing strain of continuing human expansion and industrialization on the environment is a major, and increasing, cause of conflict in the world. It is no accident that the Chiapas rebellion is in one of the last rain forests, the Selva Lacandona, in the world (Langelle, 1995). Resource wars have always been common and continue to be, from storming armored columns in the Gulf War to armed resistance to wolves in the national parks of the United States. This whole range of conflicts will increase as resources continue to be depleted while the requirements of the human population of the world increase. The same dynamic underlies the growing danger of a worldwide pandemic.

The global increase in human communication has fundamentally changed both the nature of local conflicts as well as the potentialities for peace. International networking is increasing. The UN may appear sadly ineffectual in many cases, but it remains a remarkable attempt to control war. The internationalization of human culture is producing many important effects, from multinational companies (resistant as never before to the powers of nation-states) to the growth of what the Zapatistas call "international civil society." What it may lead to is not just unclear, it has yet to be determined.

But that hasn't put a crimp into meta-analysis, such as Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" described above and, to be honest, this very book. Two Rand prognosticators, for example, have gone so far as to proclaim that "Cyberwar is Coming!" and they have carefully redefined existing notions of "information war" into various classes of cyberwar and netwar (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1993). But for them, as for most war theorists, the goal is to improve war, not to understand war itself in the context of contemporary society. The broader implications, from horrific to idyllic, of war's latest evolution do not concern them.

But that is the concern of this book. War is not just in transition, it is in crisis. What it will become will determine not just some aspect of the human future but whether or not we have one. There are some reasons for optimism and many for terror, but the story itself starts with confusion,
confusion over the very idea of war. Put crudely, "Is it nuclear submarines? Fertilizer bombs? Genocide? Peacekeepers? All of the above?"

In April 1994 the USS Oklahoma, the most advanced nuclear hunter-killer submarine of the U.S. Navy, was relaunched after her major multimillion dollar upgrade and overhaul (Wood, 1994, p. A3). Her mission: to destroy "boomers," enemy ballistic submarines, none of which threaten the United States now, if they ever did. Roughly a year later, the city she honored, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, shook as a gigantic fertilizer bomb destroyed the federal office building there killing scores of people.

That spring of 1995 the international news media breathlessly covered the spread of the Ebola virus in Zaire. At the same time, in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Congress went ahead with plans to spend $60 billion on 30 new attack submarines while the Centers for Disease Control's budget for non-AIDS infectious diseases was set for $36 million. Scientists such as Donald Henderson of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health warn that if the United States hopes to prevent a plague of Ebola or a similar virus from eventually sweeping the country, at least $150 million a year should be spent on early-warning clinics and virology labs in the field. This expenditure, never approved, is the equivalent of one-tenth the cost of a submarine, or one F-22 jet fighter. David Corn of The Nation (1995, p. 781) asks, "Which is the greater threat to the nation's security—the lethal virus or the unidentified enemy?"

In some human communities defining the real threats is not a problem. For example, for the people of Chiapas in southern Mexico, the threat is clear. It is the response that is complicated.

From Chiapas to the Future

What governments should really fear is a communications expert.

—Subcomandante Marcos to a Newsweek reporter
(quoted in Watson et al., 1995, p. 37)

Some say it is the first postmodern revolution, others say that it is the last Central American revolution, even geographically speaking.

—Subcomandante Marcos on the Chiapas Conflict
(Marcos, 1994, p. 10)

Subcomandante Marcos traces the struggle he is part of to the Spanish invasion of Mexico, to "the Conquest that began, well, not exactly five hundred years ago, and that continues..." (Marcos, 1994, p. 10). But for all their long history there is also something new about the Zapatistas of the 1990s.
Theirs is a hybrid movement, with the traditional virtues of peasant rebellions augmented by media-savvy spokespeople who use the internet and the tabloid press with the shamelessness of athletic shoe companies. Marcos, the biggest Zapatista media star (but not the only one in Mexico by any means), is at times humble ("We are all Marcos." "I am merely a subcomandante.") and at others flirtatious. He ended one communiqué with "The Sup, rearranging his ski mask with macabre flirtatiousness" (Guillermoprieto, 1995, p. 44). He is also willing to kill and to die. The New York Times calls him "the region's first postmodern guerrilla hero" (Golden, 1994, p. A3). That may or may not be so, but he is clearly part of a sophisticated attempt by the Zapatistas to break their political isolation with a strange combination of local small unit attacks, national mobilizations, and international appeals.

Zapatista communiqués flash around the world on the Internet propelled by an electronic alliance of human rights and solidarity groups, appearing in Mexican newspapers and on hundreds of thousands of personal computers within hours of their release. The Zapatistas are very conscious users of "counterinformation" mainly distributed through the Internet.

Governmental responses have included the traditional killings and gang rapes, including at least one attack on a U.S. supporter traveling in Mexico, but they have also struck directly at the Zapatista infostructure, raiding the local purveyors of the Zapatista communiqués, arresting one as a Zapatista leader, and claiming that there is no way to check the accuracy of information on the Internet. But then how does one check the accuracy of the information in The New York Times? As it turns out, Internet information is much more quickly corrected and democratically collected than that in any print publication. Anyone participating in an ongoing newsgroup can easily keep track of what all interested readers, including those on the scene and with direct knowledge, think of what is posted. It is interactive information, constantly under scrutiny, unlike the information distributed by the multinational conglomerates who own the press and the rest of the mass media.

One of the major outlets for Zapatista thinking, Zapatistas: Documents of the New Mexican Revolution, was collected on the Internet and was first produced as an electronic text before being published by Autonomedia. In their communiqué of March 11, 1995, the Zapatistas specifically mention the role of "international civil society," mobilized in many cases electronically, in helping their cause. For a movement so focused on communication and information, an appreciation of the growing international electronic networks is not surprising.

So how is it that this peasant/Indian rebellion mobilizes the most contemporary of weapons in the service of revolutionary objectives built around information and choice? This book is an attempt to explain this and the many apparent paradoxes of contemporary war. For the moment, it should be sufficient to give a long quotation from the articulate Subcoman-
dante Marcos, who describes the goals of his 500-year-old struggle in terms that refuse the sureties of modernism, both reactionary and revolutionary:

The people have to decide what proposal to accept, and it's the people who you have to convince that your opinion is correct. This will radically change the concept of revolution, of who the revolutionary class is, of what a revolutionary organization is. Now, the problem isn't in fighting against the other proposals, but instead in trying to convince the people. It's because of this that the Zapatista revolution isn't proposing the taking of power, it isn't proposing a homogeneous ideological concept of revolution. We are saying that yes, we do have our idea of how the country should be, but something is lacking before we talk about this. We cannot replicate the same logic as the government. They have a vision for the country that they have imposed on the people with the arms of the Federal Army. We cannot reverse this logic and say that now the Zapatista vision is going to be imposed on the people with the arms of the Zapatista army. We are saying, “Let's destroy this state, this state system. Let's open up this space and confront the people with ideas, not with weapons.” This is why we propose democracy, freedom and justice. (Marcos, 1994, p. 11)

Victory, for Marcos, isn't achieving state power, it is reconfiguring power. When a New Yorker reporter told Marcos that it was a delusion to think the Zapatistas could really capture Mexico City, he replied, “Weren't we there already by January 2nd? We were everywhere, on the lips of everyone—in the subway, on the radio. And our flag was in the Zócalo” (Guillermoprieto, 1995, p. 41). At a Mexican press conference he noted, “We did not go to war on January 1 to kill or to have them kill us. We went to make ourselves heard” (Golden, 1994, p. A3).

* * *

Hitchhiking through Utah some 15 years ago I was picked up by a guy who told me to call him Red. He had just gotten off work, so we had a few beers and drove toward the setting sun. Red got to talking and told me of his job. He worked at the Moab uranium enrichment facility. A shift leader. Good pay, but . . . hard work. Lots of hassle regs. Sometimes he was so radioactive at the end of the day that even after ten showers he couldn't go home to his wife and daughter. Those nights he slept on site as he waited for his body to shed enough radioactivity from his skin, bowels, lungs, bladder, and mucous membranes so he could sleep with his family.

I have met many such people, each marked in their own way as deeply as Red by our war-ready world. I have seen many places that are part of the same system that runs Moab to make plutonium. At Torrejón, outside of Madrid, I lived with some of the young guys who load and unload supersonic
fighter-bombers with nuclear explosives every day. In Barcelona I spent one New Year’s Eve celebrating with U.S. Marines, who that same year found themselves targets in Lebanon. Inside Lawrence Livermore Laboratories I encountered a dozen of the scientists and managers who design these weapons and their delivery systems. In the backcountry of Vandenberg Air Force Base I have seen the test launchpads for intercontinental missile tests and spent many hours debating their morality with the people who improve them. Even now, in 1996, I have one student who is a Serbian writing about her war guilt and another who was a SEAL commando in Grenada, Panama, and the Persian Gulf. War is, and has always been, personal.

Coincidentally enough, my interests in war, and postmodern war itself, both crystallized in the same place: Vietnam. I was a toddler when my parents took me to live in Saigon during a lull in the long Indochina War. There I collected old helmets and spent bullets with thoughtless pleasure. As I’ve grown older my feelings toward war have grown much more complicated and much less clear.

A few years ago I visited an embalmed Titan missile silo in Green Valley, Arizona. It floats on giant springs for riding out a near-miss. I sat in one of the easy chairs. I reached for the key. I pushed the red button. A year later I watched TV in horrified fascination as my country technologically dismembered Iraq, killing hundreds of thousands. Since then there have been many wars. Literally dozens.

It haunts me. The sheer weight of war’s materiality and the violence of its inscription on the body politic, as well as my own body, force me to seek an explanation for the strange danse macabre of our age, war. The focus of my research, and what makes the current situation so particularly dangerous, is the increasing application of the incredible powers of technoscience to war.

The central role of invention, science, and high technology in war today has many ramifications both subtle and obvious. The connection between war and technoscience has long been intimate; now it is integral. A certain basic level of technology is what makes war possible. But in the last few hundred years there has been an incredible increase in the interdependent connections between the forces of creation and of destruction. The latest, perhaps decisive, link is between computers and the military.

Current policy of the U.S. Department of Defense makes advanced computing a necessity: it is crucial for the military utilization of space; it is central to the AirLand Battle doctrine used in the Gulf War; it is a key part of drug wars and peacekeeping missions. In general it is integral to the C^{4}I^{2} needs (command, control, communication, computers, intelligence, and interoperability) of all types of war conceived of by the Pentagon, from “limited” (covert, guerrilla, net-, cyber-, counterterrorist) to “general” (nuclear, subnuclear, near-nuclear). This computerization of war is the culmina-
tion of a long process of mechanizing management and rationality in the U.S. military, and it has led to the system of postmodern war.

My particular theoretical approaches are varied and not even equivalent. They come from many disciplines (Foucault, 1980; Geertz, 1973; Latour, 1981) and form a "tool kit." They have been chosen because of their utility (at convincing, predicting, even intervening) and because of their beauty (ethically, aesthetically), not because any particular view is the one truth. I don't believe in one truth any more than the Zapatistas do. I don't expect a reader to say, "Ah, yes, that is the way it is." Instead, I hope for, "Oh, if you look at it like that, it does make some important things clearer, while making others obscure no doubt." To build something specific one uses particular tools. To use tools well involves knowing their strengths and weaknesses, their advantages and dangers. The choice of tools also determines the actual process of construction. In the case of this work my tools are chosen because I wish to learn something of the unfolding dynamics of postmodern war, and even play some small part in our practical understanding, and therefore shaping, of its discourse.

This desire is what leads to my interest in power and how it is generated. This study, then, is of the juncture of ideals, metals, chemicals, and people that makes weapons of computers and computers of weapons and soldiers. More, I want to understand something about the rules of this often deadly game, and about the rules for making those rules (the metarules). Gregory Bateson once remarked on the importance of this politically:

The problem of the international game is how to change the rules, whereas game theory tends to give us solutions to the questions of how to not lose according to the rules as they now are. Nobody knows a thing about changing the rules of the game. (quoted in Brand, 1974, p. 27)

I have tried to focus on an analysis that makes a difference, rather than a view that claims to be truer than any other. This is also an implicit recognition that even if there were grounds for one totalizing vision it would be a mistake. Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, has set this stage clearly:

Every claim to authority of the book on which pride of race, pride of communion, the illusion of special endowment, special privilege, and divine favor were based has been exploded... The faith in Scripture of the Middle Ages, faith in reason of the Enlightenment, faith in science of modern Philistia, belongs equally today to those alone who have as yet no idea of how mysterious really, is the mystery even of themselves. (1962, p. 609)

This collapse of totality can be embraced even if the confusion that has resulted sometimes seems like a suffocating void. A poet (Ractor, 1982) has
written, “She whispers fantasizing: The Chamber is barren. All of us recognize our void view.”

Going beyond “our void view” is not easy. It depends on where we choose to look. Donna Haraway, the philosopher of science, points out one possible direction (1985). She revels in how modern technoscience is producing incredible changes in ourselves and on our actual bodies as well as in and on the world around us. A central symbol of this is the cyborg—cybernetic organism—a human integrated with a machine. That the cyborg is coming true on the battlefield and that he is a central metaphor of discourse about future war is an important theme of this book.

For Haraway, the way to deal with this cyborgization of ourselves is not back, or around, but through. In her essay, ironically titled “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Haraway insists that

taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. (1985, p. 100)

This work is of that dream.

* * *

Last night I went to a college basketball game with my family. Before the game the band played “The Star Spangled Banner” and we sang along. It took me a few moments to notice that the flag I was hailing was an electronic image on the scoreboard—a virtual flag waving in a simulated breeze under electronic sunlight. But looking around at the gathered Oregonians I could tell that their feelings for that simulated flag, and whatever it represents, were real. False flags can inspire real fervor. Doctrines of war can certainly breed real conflicts, as can myths, metaphors, and illusions. With war, people are always in denial. But under the many layers of talk about war, from the art of war to infowar, there is war itself, feeding upon dead and maimed bodies. To deny this is just to ask for the return of what it is that is repressed—the bloody reality of war.

This book is written against denial. Denial takes many forms. It can claim that war is mere spectacle and simulation, as some postmodernist
theorists do. It can claim an end of history, as many conservatives have. It is the infatuation with new superficial theories of pseudowar, such as cyberwar, in the face of the apocalyptic dangers of real war. It is to assume that real peace is not possible. All of these denials could prove fatal to humanity for war is not just interested in us now, as Tolstoy and Trotsky apparently warned. It is more than interested. War has us in its grip, and we have it. We shall determine our future, if any, together.