

# Political power, technology, and total war:

## Two French views

ROY PIERCE

*Department of Political Science, University of Michigan*

"Total" war and "limited" war are part of our daily vocabulary, and policy-makers and scholars are trying to identify the conditions under which the latter, rather than the former, can be made the framework of armed conflict between the major powers, should war erupt. Two of the most important French political thinkers, MM. Raymond Aron and Bertrand de Jouvenel, have been preoccupied by the colossal warfare of the last half-century. M. de Jouvenel was inspired by revulsion against the destruction of World War II to engage in fundamental considerations of political philosophy and the attempt to develop the beginnings of a "pure" political theory. M. Aron's writings are much more closely related to what he calls the "conjuncture"—the convergence of forces upon the international scene—and the relation between war and politics is a more central and unifying concern for him than it is for M. de Jouvenel. But both men have contributed views on the nature of warfare and on the ways in which it has been and can be limited. It is the purpose of this article to summarize and analyze these views.

### *I. The Extension and Intensification of Warfare*

The words "total" and "limited," as applied to warfare, are not wholly self-explanatory; they require definition. The closest that M. Aron comes to giving a definition of

total war is to describe it as "the merciless mobilization of the national resources and a race for inventions" (4, p. 23). This definition would seem to be acceptable to M. de Jouvenel, who thinks of total war as involving "the total identification of the nation with the army" and the full utilization of a country's resources (6, p. 185). By inversion, therefore, limited war is war for which only a fraction of the nation's resources is employed.<sup>1</sup>

MM. Aron and de Jouvenel are agreed that warfare has become increasingly destructive, although their analyses of military history are not identical because the par-

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<sup>1</sup> There are two other standpoints from which M. Aron regards war. Borrowing an expression used by Guglielmo Ferrero, he calls World War I "hyperbolic," because of its generalization and long duration. Hyperbolic war is not necessarily the same as total war; M. Aron points out that the complete German mobilization for World War II was designed to produce total war but to avoid a hyperbolic one (5, p. 175). M. Aron is also concerned with the relations between wars. The conduct of one war may pave the way for another. World War II can be traced back directly to the hyperbolic character of World War I, which accounted for the Russian Revolution and the growth of fascism in Germany and Italy. "It all seems as though, beyond a certain point, violence became self-perpetuating. For war, as for fissionable matter, there is a critical volume. Since 1914, Europe has experienced a 'chain reaction' of warfare" (4, p. 36).

ticular arguments they advance and illustrate are not identical. M. de Jouvenel is particularly impressed with the limitations of medieval warfare. The Capetians fought with seignorial contingents which were at their disposal for only forty days; feudal monarchs had to bear the cost of war out of the resources of their domains alone; the people of medieval cities could ignore wars, provided only that they were located a little apart from the theaters of operations (6, p. 187). M. Aron does not deal with medieval warfare; in discussing limited warfare in the past, he emphasizes the European wars of the eighteenth century, before the French Revolution. Before 1789, wars had limited objectives, and the employment of limited forces reflected a correspondence between means and ends. The soldiers of the eighteenth century were precious matériel, difficult to replace. They were professionals who fought by trade and not for ideas; they had to be kept under rigid discipline. This discipline could be maintained only if the army did not move too far from its base of supplies. Therefore, there was little mobility of troops, who were always encumbered with baggage and who took up quarters during the winter. Generals were prudent and avoided costly engagements; they maneuvered and undertook sieges, but they avoided decisive battles (5, p. 179).

However differently MM. Aron and de Jouvenel approach warfare before the French Revolution, they both see in that event a major turning point in military history. The crucial, though not the only, innovation that accounted for the change was the introduction of conscription by the Convention in 1793. This opened, in M. de Jouvenel's view, the era of cannon fodder. It also opened, in M. Aron's view, an era of new and less rigid military tactics. Because the price of soldiers was reduced, the limitations on the older armies were removed.

The Revolution, by augmenting manpower and altering military organization and tactics, changed the nature of warfare. It also threw up new men at the head of the armies, men who were not prisoners of old theories and old habits. By 1796, Napoleon had devised a new strategy of annihilation.

The nineteenth century escaped further intensification and extension of warfare after the Congress of Vienna, but the twentieth century saw the destructive movement pick up momentum again. M. de Jouvenel emphasizes the gradual evolution, out of improvised and empirical practices, of the notion of the total identification of the nation with the army in Germany during World War I, a doctrine which was later refined and carefully applied by the Nazi regime. M. Aron generally offers a similar interpretation. He sees the Nazi regime as a political system geared exclusively to warfare, but he emphasizes the adoption by the Germans of new concepts of military organization and tactics which originated in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution. Again, regardless of differences in their isolation of particular causes of and stages in the development, MM. Aron and de Jouvenel are agreed on the nature of the development itself. There is a close relationship between political organization and military organization; political revolutions have created military revolutions; although the growth curve of the intensity and extensiveness of warfare is neither constant nor unbroken, the curve is upward. Both men observe that the proportion of national resources employed in warfare has increased. Both men indicate changes that have taken place in military morality. And M. Aron singles out as another factor in the growth of warfare the stakes for which wars are fought. Men once fought for provinces or the adjustment of frontiers. During World War I the stakes were still only the relative strength of na-

tions. By World War II the stakes were the existence of nations.

## II. *Political Power and Technology*

The crucial question, of course, is why the extension and intensification of warfare have taken place. To this question, MM. Aron and de Jouvenel give answers that sometimes coincide but are not identical.

M. de Jouvenel's answer is by far the simpler of the two. According to him, "everything is thrown into warfare because power [the machinery of government] commands everything" (6, p. 187). It is inadequate to attribute the growth of warfare to the ambitions of leaders or the needs of a nation that is attacked. There were ambitious leaders and hard-pressed nations when warfare was limited. The cause of the scope and intensity of modern warfare is "the material and moral levers at the disposal of modern governments." It is the power of governments which makes total mobilization possible (6, p. 13).

It is clear that M. de Jouvenel is thinking of power over things as well as of power over men, but it is on the latter that he concentrates his attention. The increase in the political power of rulers (not the growth of technology) is the central point of his analysis. In this context, M. de Jouvenel is indifferent to the form of political power except only insofar as it affects the extent of political power. It was the Germany of World War I which produced the "doctrine" of total war, but it was democracy (by which he refers to the French political system of 1793) which "invented" total war. Democracy may arm governments for warfare to an extent that less popular forms of government cannot. A government that is remote from the people is not likely to be able to exact as many sacrifices from them as one that appears to be close to the people (6, pp. 171-72).

M. Aron's explanation of the growth of total war (and the development of hyperbolic war) is less clear-cut and more cautious. Like M. de Jouvenel, M. Aron sees a correspondence between military operations and political organization, but, unlike M. de Jouvenel, he pays close attention to the role of technology in affecting warfare. While M. de Jouvenel explains total war primarily in political terms, M. Aron explains it both politically and technologically.

If I understand M. Aron's analysis correctly, it runs as follows: There is generally a proportion between military means (resources, tactics, and organization) and ends (the military and political objectives). Total war is characterized by the enormous resources employed as means and also by ideological passions, which not only enlarge the means by making greater sacrifices acceptable to the combatants but also enlarge the ends. Means and ends being proportional, any increase in available means or enlargement of the desired ends increases the other factor. Now means and ends may be affected by both technology and political organization. The military revolution of 1793, according to M. Aron, was caused by a political revolution which increased the resources in manpower, altered military organization and tactics, and produced new strategies. The hyperbolic character of World War I, however, had technology as the "motor" of its evolution, although M. Aron states that he does not present this interpretation without reservation or qualifications. The intervention of the United States was the direct result of the inability of the Franco-British alliance to cope with the new, technologically conditioned German tactic of unrestricted submarine warfare. The development of war propaganda was necessary because "sublime and vague" principles alone were proportionate to the violence, sacrifices, and heroism that the

military technology produced and required. As the cost of the war increased, so it appeared to the allied political leaders that the significance of the victory had to be enlarged. "It was claimed that the peace would be durable only if it were based on terms dictated to the enemy after the destruction of the enemy. This bitter-end attitude was less the expression of a political philosophy than a reflex of total war" (4, p. 33).

The military revolution of 1939 was the expression of a political philosophy and, like that of 1793, its origin was a political revolution. Germany adopted Russian military innovations and geared her entire political and social organization to warfare. When the war broke out, it, like those of 1793 and 1914, was a war of ideologies, but, while the clash of ideologies during World War I was the consequence of technology, the war of 1939 was a war of ideologies because of its political inspiration. Germany started the war to establish an empire, and the establishment of an empire, in M. Aron's view, assumes the propagation of an ideology. Because it was an imperial war, it was necessarily an ideological war.

At the same time that technology and political organization affect both the means and the ends of warfare, the means and ends of warfare affect both technology and political organization (5, p. 173). Political revolutions can create military revolutions, but military revolutions can also create political revolutions. M. Aron suggests that in one sense the totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany emerged from total war in that it accepted its implications. And there is the larger question, in which M. Aron is vitally interested, of the consequences of warfare upon the whole political conjuncture, for M. Aron sees the actual battle, whether politically or technologically conditioned, as

more important than the origin of the conflict or the treaty of peace in creating the consequences of a war. Finally, although he does not argue that technology is the cause of the present conjuncture, M. Aron does point out that, in a certain sense, there is a single phenomenon—the expansion of an industrial civilization based on science and its application to industry—at the origin of each of the three main characteristics of the present international political scene: planetary unity and the bipolar structure of diplomacy; the spread of communism, of which one of the two political giants is the homeland, in Asia and Europe; and the discovery of weapons of mass destruction (2, pp. 250–51; 4, pp. 197, 202).

M. Aron sees "the adventure of science and technology" as "the decisive fact of our epoch." "That is what is at the basis of the social crisis of the European societies and of the menace of death which hangs over them" (3, p. 339). Yet, if technology is the central fact, it is not a wholly determining fact. Men are not condemned to exploit destructively the potentialities of their technology. "Technology has put its stamp on modern barbarity . . . [but] it has not been demonstrated that men conceived these horrible goals because they possessed the means to achieve them. Knowledge puts a variety of instruments at the disposal of men; it does not determine how they use them" (4, pp. 492–93).

There is much in common between the analyses of M. Aron and de Jouvenel. Sovereign states are naturally rivals. All states are not naturally ambitious and imperialistic, but the extensive preparation for war of any one state requires its neighbors to follow suit in order to maintain their security. Wars grow in intensity as the resources at the command of governments increase. The government feeds resources into war, and the needs of war enlarge the gov-

ernment's claims upon those resources. Warfare stirs passions, and passions enlarge warfare. But while M. de Jouvenel centers his analysis on the power of governments, M. Aron centers his on the technology which gives governments so much power.

### III. *Limited War and Political Organization*

What avenues to the limitation of warfare do these two approaches to the causes of total war suggest? For M. de Jouvenel, whose analysis is the simpler of the two, the theoretical answer to the question of how to limit warfare is also simple. "Power is linked to war, and if a society wants to limit the ravages of war, there is no other way than to limit the faculties of power" (6, p. 177). The questions which remain, of course, are whether and how this can be done. For M. Aron's analysis, the corresponding prescription might appear to be to stop or reverse the march of technology, but M. Aron does not spend much time rejecting this solution: "Faustian men will not abandon by themselves the road to knowledge, even if that road also leads to catastrophe" (2, p. 257). But while M. Aron recognizes that the risks of catastrophe exist, he does not hold that catastrophe is inevitable, and he believes that technology gives promise of enormous benefits. Technology intensifies and extends warfare, but it also increases wealth, and M. Aron regards the increase of wealth as a necessary, even if insufficient, condition of justice and social peace. "Only technological progress permits us to envisage, on the horizon of history, a civilization which would not be based on slavery. Whatever they may say, the opponents of technological progress are all supporters of slavery" (3, p. 342). For M. Aron, as well as for M. de Jouvenel, the limitation of war requires a political solution.

M. de Jouvenel is concerned with analyzing the growth of political power and its consequences, one of which is the increased destructiveness of war, but he does not indicate the specific means by which political power would be controlled, to his satisfaction, in the modern world. He has apparently cast himself in the role of diagnostician of what he regards as ills, but he does not prescribe specific remedies. He tells us the ways in which power has been limited in the past, but he makes no recommendations for the present.<sup>2</sup> In general, he sees in "moral authorities" and "intermediary social powers" the agents "which surround, protect and direct men, preventing and impeding the intervention of power" (6, p. 455). With respect to the specific question of limiting war, he argues that history shows that aristocratic regimes are best. Aristocratic regimes give the least to warfare because they are the most resistant to the expansion of centralized power. The interests, prejudices, and class solidarity of aristocrats all operate against their co-operation in the construction of a strong, centralized state which would limit their independence and their wealth (6, pp. 227-28). Aristocratic regimes may seem to have been inherently military because they were governed by a warrior class, but this is misleading because in the aristocratic system the dominant class was the *only* warrior group and the people did not become involved in warfare unless the battle happened to take place in their vicinity (6, pp. 177-78). But M. de Jouvenel does not argue in favor of the generalization of aristocratic regimes, or some modern counterpart of them, in our time. In fact, he de-

<sup>2</sup> Unless it be in these sentences, near the conclusion of a discussion of law: "We must return to Aristotle, St. Thomas, Montesquieu. What they have said is tangible and none of it is out of date" (6, p. 385).

liberately avoids the question of whether the institutions that can effectively limit the power of governments can be created and maintained by the conscious efforts of men. This is a problem which implies, in his view, "that of the autonomy and of the efficacy of the human will, and, to be more exact, of the limits of man" (6, p. 366).

M. Aron at one time also regarded the internal organization of states as a crucial factor in the limitation of warfare, although only as one of several. Since preparation for war requires a certain organization of government and society, the internal organization of states is a matter of first importance for the maintenance of peace and security. But while M. Aron may well agree with M. de Jouvenel about the role of aristocratic regimes in limiting warfare in past centuries, he is unimpressed with the consequences of aristocratic regimes in the age of technology. Where aristocratic values survived into the industrial era they were not conducive to peace or the limitation of warfare. "In spite of everything," M. Aron writes, "the Western societies increasingly pacified economic life by submitting it to the impersonal laws of the market. Efforts at enrichment by conquest would seem to be characteristic of military societies; the more a nation retains the stamp of feudalism (Germany, Japan), the more it inclines toward imperialism" (4, p. 68). Technology in the hands of an aristocracy turned out, in M. Aron's view, to be more destructive than it did in the hands of the bourgeoisie, which M. de Jouvenel judges severely. In Japan, "as in Germany, industrial civilization was inserted into a social context of which the values were aristocratic and not bourgeois. Industry provided an incomparable means of satisfying the desire for power and glory" (2, p. 279).

Writing during World War II, M. Aron argued that the generalization of democracy

was one of the conditions of collective security. In one important sense the logic of his position in favor of the expansion of democracy is the same as the logic which underlies M. de Jouvenel's high regard for the historic role of aristocracy. M. de Jouvenel regards aristocracy as the system which has most effectively limited power; M. Aron regards democracy as the system which today most effectively limits it. In addition, M. Aron regards legitimate governments ("regular governments, accepted by the majority") as less inclined than illegitimate ones to engage in unrelenting warfare because "they are ordinarily neither motivated by excessive ambition nor pushed forward by fear" (5, p. 296). The argument is historically sound. The age of democracy has not been with us long, but, so far, no major war has pitted democracy against democracy. But the argument, of course, breaks down at its point of application at the present time. How can democracy, or any legitimate government within M. Aron's meaning of the term, be imposed on nations prepared to defend their different constituent principles with all the weapons at their command?

M. Aron never regarded the generalization of democracy as more than one of the conditions for the maintenance of peace and the restriction of warfare. He saw two other conditions as also necessary: a balance of power and a limitation of military technology. The balance of power has been established, but military technology has advanced at an unparalleled pace. In the face of these developments, M. Aron has continued to devote his talents and energy to studying the possibilities of limiting warfare in an era which is unique "in the fact that the threat of unlimited war is posed not by the bellicosity of man, nor by the character of governments, nor even by the

vastness of the stakes, but by the nature of the available weapons" (1, p. 101).

#### IV. *Disarmament and Limited War*

M. Aron has not been optimistic about the prospects of disarmament (2, pp. 246-59). An agreement on the reduction or stabilization of conventional arms is conceivable; it would be useful as an indication of good will and peaceful intentions; but it would mean that the great powers would rely even more on nuclear weapons than they do now. Moreover, M. Aron regards such an agreement as unlikely, for three reasons: its lack of critical significance; his opinion that neither Washington nor Moscow is vitally interested in it; and its dependence on inspection and control, which have already failed in Korea and elsewhere. A cessation or a limitation of the race for nuclear arms would be more significant, but M. Aron regards that as even more unlikely than the first alternative, if only because it would imply the cessation of research and because it could be undertaken only at a point of equality between the great powers, a point which neither side can be sure it has reached. And, writing in 1956, before the announcement of successful missile launchings, M. Aron took missiles development into consideration and concluded that it would be impossible to control numerous and concealed launching platforms. The only effective motive that M. Aron could see, in 1956, for stopping the armaments race would be the joint desire of the current nuclear powers to keep the other nations out of their club.

The armaments race among the existing nuclear powers, then, is unlikely to be stopped, however much it would be the course of wisdom to stop it. Does this mean that all wars in which the nuclear powers may become involved must become nuclear wars and that, once a war becomes a nu-

clear war, it must become a general war, implying the total destruction of the combatants? M. Aron's answers are these (1, 2, pp. 301-44): All wars need not be nuclear wars, any more than the series of post-World War II conflicts in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East became nuclear wars. Even if a local war became a nuclear war, it would not necessarily be transformed into a general war, although there would always be the risk that one side would consider the use of certain weapons as incompatible with the limitation of the conflict. What is questionable, however, is whether a general war could be prevented from becoming a total war. The central problem, therefore, although not, of course, the only one, is that of preventing local wars from becoming a general war. How can this be done?

There are two parts to M. Aron's answer to this question. The first is for the Western powers to relate their armaments to the various kinds of wars that may erupt, thereby avoiding being placed in a military situation for which their arms may be either inadequate or too destructive. The West, viewed collectively, should have four main types of armaments. It must possess nuclear and thermonuclear weapons, missiles, and aircraft at least equal to those of the Soviet Union. It must have large conventional forces in Europe to prevent the occurrence of *faits accomplis* and to demonstrate a resolution to resort, if need be, to ultimate weapons. It must have other large units capable of intervening, with or without recourse to atomic armaments, in local wars. And it must have troops capable of dealing with guerrilla warfare as long, at least, as the Europeans want to maintain control over certain overseas territories. This scheme represents, of course, the application of the graduated deterrent theory or, as M. Aron prefers to call it, the graduated reprisal theory.

The second part of M. Aron's answer is concerned not with weapons but with the stakes of the conflict. Total war would be risked if one side tried to wrest advantages from the enemy that the latter would concede only after having struggled to the end. These advantages, if I understand M. Aron correctly, are inherent only in one geographical area—Europe—while elsewhere the stakes are not high enough for the major powers to conduct a war of extermination, regardless of the arms they might employ in a conflict. But, regardless of what kind of war may erupt, even in the event of a general war, M. Aron argues that the West must not carve out for itself "objectives that are incompatible with the survival and the dignity of the enemy countries." This does not mean that it should "confuse the renunciation of total victory with the willingness to call it a draw. Military successes are not excluded by a limitation of the war." It does mean, however, that the West must not adopt a policy of unconditional surrender. M. Aron does not seem to have given up the hope that armaments control may be achieved at some future date—in fact, he cites it as the al-

ternative to catastrophe—and he urges that the Western powers must currently prepare for it, but in the present phase of the nuclear age his prescription for limiting war is for the West to base its policy on graduated deterrents and a willingness to negotiate compromise peace.

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