

A psychological model of war readiness and war participation

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The model tries to integrate different psychological aspects of war and answer why people participate in wars. The model is based on the wars of this century and especially on the recent wars in former Yugoslavia. It distinguishes *war readiness* and *war participation*. The former means an internal state which can be spurred so that it leads to war participation, which does not mean only fighting, but all activities that stimulate fighting. The factors influencing war readiness and war participation are divided into *amplifiers* or factors enhancing (+) them (*frustration* and *induction*) and into *reducers* or factors diminishing (-) them (*well-being*, *anti-induction*, *exhaustion*). Some factors can either enhance or diminish them (*heredity*, and *culture* with *national character*). Peace policy could be effective when it reduces the amplifiers and/or when it amplifies the reducers.

The Model

Many sociological, political, economic and psychological (apart from military) analyses of war, its causes, development and consequences have been made. Betty Glads (1990) distinguishes two kinds of factors influencing war: 1. Political, social and economic ones, and 2. Psychological ones. Both interact and influence each other. Psychologists have investigated war from specific psychological points of view, such as violence and cruelty (Staub 1989), decision making (Rapoport 1990), or motivation (Kellett 1990). The following psychological model tries to integrate many psychological views and to answer why people participate in wars. The model is based on the wars of this century, especially on the recent war in former Yugoslavia.

The model describes the main psychological (including psychobiological and psychosocial) factors influencing war participation from before it starts until it ends. It distinguishes *war readiness* and *war participation*. The former means an internal state which can be spurred so that it leads to war participation, which does not mean only fighting, but all activities that stimulate fighting, such as propaganda, participating rallies, producing arms, collecting money (during WW 1 many German couples waived even their wedding-rings), persecuting members of the opposing national groups (during WW 2 American citizens of Japa-

nese origin were confined, and in 1991-1993 some Yugoslavian Albanians »disappeared«), spying, committing acts of sabotage etc.

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Heredity

The initial points in the model are *human genetic equipment* (heredity) and *culture*. Everybody is born with certain heredity and in a certain culture, both of which influence his/her later life.

One of the first to speak about the aggressive human nature was the philosopher Hobbes. He said that the original human state was war, and his well-known slogan was »Homo homini Lupus«.

Several *theories of aggressive instinct* explain human aggressiveness and war as a consequence of an inborn instinct directing humans toward aggressive behavior. It functions like hunger, sex or any other drive. According to the ethologist Konrad Lorenz (1966), an aggressive act is a direct response not to an external stimulus, but to the »innate releasing mechanisms«. Aggression can erupt even in the absence of a stimulus, because the stored instinctual energy needs to be discharged. Humans not only possess more aggressiveness than any other animals but also cannot sufficiently control it.

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The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, distinguished two basic instincts, *eros* and *thanatos* (ancient Greek word for death), the latter being responsible for violence, war, and destruction. It is interesting to note that the great physicist Albert Einstein (1933) interpreted war in a similar way. The instinctive theories of aggressiveness and war, however, have been much criticized (e.g. by Berkowitz 1990) and are not generally accepted.

The *theories of frustration* regard aggressiveness as an inborn reaction to frustration. It means that although aggressiveness is genetically encoded, there must be a frustration for an aggressive response. A group of psychologists from Yale University (the main representatives being Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, Sears, 1939) tried to prove the theory experimentally and reached the following conclusions (with some new illustrations):

1. Frustration causes aggressiveness. All aggressiveness is related to previous frustration.

2. Aggressiveness can be transmitted to a substitute goal (the victim). The Romanians persecuted their Hungarian minority, and Bulgarians their Turkish minority. Another typical substitute goal has been the Jewish minorities persecuted from ancient times on.

3. The victim is, in some way, related to the aggressor. Muslims and Albanians in Serbia are considered to be the descendants of Turks, who are the historical enemies of Serbs. Russians and Chechens, Armenians and Azerbai-

janis are also historical enemies. The Jewish people were considered to be the »the killers of Jesus Christ«.

The frustration theory of aggressiveness is well documented, though it cannot explain certain forms of aggressiveness, e.g. *instrumental aggressiveness*, which operates in war situations, too. In 1993, the Yugoslavian soldiers (mostly Montenegrin volunteers) robbed most houses, hotels and workshops in the occupied part of south Dalmatia and sent several thousand cows home to Montenegro. They stole the piano of the famous singer Tereza Kesovija, which was later found in Belgrade.

Many authors (e.g. Altman 1975, and most ethologists) relate aggressiveness and war to an inborn *territorial instinct*. The territorial behavior is well known among many species of animals. The areas are protected from other members of the same species and normally conspecifics are not even allowed entry. In humans the concept of territoriality is similar, but it often takes on different and much more complex forms. Most wars among countries have been fought for the acquisition of new territory or for maintenance and defense of the already possessed one. In Bosnia the main question at the negotiations of the fighting sides (Serbs, Croats and Muslims) was: »Who will get larger and more significant part of the territory?«

Territory is also typical of »little wars« between gangs in large cities and Mafia families. Territoriality is a kind of instrumental behavior. Some authors (e.g. Altman) con-

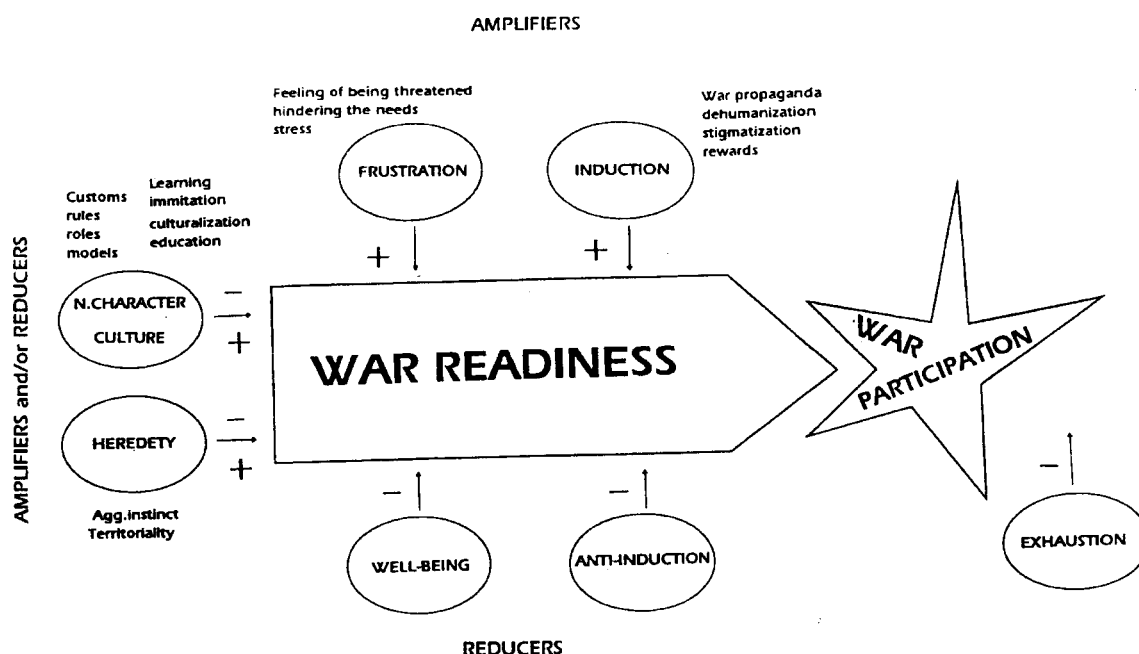


Figure 1. The psychological model of war readiness and war participation

sider that in humans its origin is not instinctual, but is learned instrumental behavior.

Culture and National Character

The next factors are *culture* and *national character*. There are great differences in the aggressiveness of various ethnic and cultural groups; these can be roughly divided into the peaceful ones (e.g. Arapeshi from New Guinea and Pueblos from Arizona, or contemporary Scandinavians and Czechs) and the warlike ones (e.g. Spartans, Turks, Apaches, most Balkan peoples).

Culture not only stimulates aggressive and peaceful behavior, but shapes it. There have been great differences in rearing practices of different tribal and ethnic groups. Aggressive tribes imposed many frustrations on children almost from their birth on. A Comanche mother ceased breastfeeding her baby before it was satiated. Only after he beat her back, she continued feeding him. On the other hand, the peaceful Pueblos were forbidden to beat a child. They were one of the few tribes where beating a child was a taboo.

The treatment of enemies among various cultures significantly differed too, some of them practiced impaling and beheading (typical of part of the Balkans), scalping and even cannibalism, others incorporating prisoners in their own tribe or exchanging them for various goods.

National character represents the personality characteristics of the average member of a national population (Gregory 1984). The concept was first used by the famous anthropologists Benedict (1934) and Mead (1935). The national character is formed during a long historical development in accordance with geographic, economic, and ethnic circumstances. There is a steady interaction between culture and national character. The latter reflects culture, its present and past, and helps to preserve it.

The first to write about the particular Balkan character referring to people in what was to become Yugoslavia was the Serbian ethnographer Jovan Cvijić (1914); he called it "the character of the south Slavic nations". Using a kind of field study he found four main subtypes; the most important and widespread was considered to be the Dinaric subtype having the following characteristics: 1. national consciousness, 2. military skills, 3. fighting spirit. Nowadays we would call them nationalism, militarism and aggressiveness.

These characteristics can be illustrated by many customs. In some regions of the former Yugoslavia (e.g. Montenegro and Herzegovina) people collect arms. The cult of heroes pervades all aspects of life. Rooms are decorated with pictures of members of the family who fell in action. Some decades ago, when celebrating the birth of a son, the

villagers of a village used to run out of the houses, fire a pistol and cry: "Long live the new hero!" Many other customs are described by Cvijić (1914) and Đilas (1958).

In the 19th century the vendetta was practiced in much of the east and mid-Balkans and in some regions it is still carried out (after the fall of communism it is reappearing). In his biography, Đilas (1958), one of the vice presidents of the former Yugoslavia, writes: "Though the life of my family is not completely typical of my homeland, Montenegro, it is typical in one respect: the men of several generations have died at the hands of Montenegrins, men of the same faith and name. My father's grandfather, both of my own grandfathers, my father, and my uncle were killed, as though a dread curse lay upon them. My father and his brother and my brothers were killed even though all of them yearned to die peacefully in their beds beside their wives. Generation after generation, and the blood chain was not broken. The inherited fear and hatred of feuding clans was mightier than fear and hatred of the enemy, the Turks. It seems to me that I was born with blood on my eyes. My first words were blood and I bathed in blood."

In 1988, all the major Yugoslav newspapers reported that some resident of Montenegro had killed his own son because of a vendetta. His own wife had killed his father and their son was the only male descendant (vendetta must not be committed against females). This incident and some others reported on in the Yugoslav dailies, are indicative not only of incomprehensible cruelty, but of an extreme compliance with tradition, myths and authorities.

The Balkan character has been formed during history by almost continuous wars with the invaders, e.g. Turks, Venetians, Hungarians, Mongols, Bulgarians, Austrians, crusaders, and internal wars among different ethnic groups.

Communism too, was a warlike culture, since its leaders always spoke about internal and external enemies, class enemies, about various threats to their countries, and built enormous armies. In former Yugoslavia in all schools (even elementary) the pupils had to do a course in military education.

An important personality trait, which facilitates aggressive behavior, is *conformity* and *obedience*. Milgram's experiments (1974) on »apparent torture« and Zimbardo's experiments (Zimbardo, 1982) on »artificial jail« have shown that ordinary people are willing to torture other people just because of their obedience to authority. Obedience and conformity are imparted to children in the families with authoritarian relations. According to Fromm (1965), the German family before WW 2 was a typical authoritarian family. Complying relation to father was transmitted to the führer of the German nation.

Authoritarian families are more typical of collective than individualistic cultures. According to Todd's map (1985) of Europe, the countries of the Balkan peninsula

(except southern Greece) are collectivist societies with authoritarian family relations. For the inhabitants of the mid-Balkans, the father of the family is the supreme boss and everybody must obey him. Besides him, the national leaders, kings, heroes, chieftains are the most important models. In addition to such concrete models, people adore many abstract symbols (e.g. flags, blazons and medals), myths (e.g. the myth of the lost battle in Kosovo 500 years ago, which must be revenged) and unwritten laws (e.g. »bessa« or never break the word of honor given to a countryman). Very important unwritten law "a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life", which was once spread over most Europe, is still strong in the Balkans, and the recent war has reinforced it.

The characteristics of cultures (habits, customs, social roles and social relations, values, ideologies) are transmitted to individual persons, especially children, via social learning. Bandura (1969) stressed *learning with observation and imitation of models* (parents, peers, teachers and leaders). His well-known experiments with children (Bandura, 1973) pointed to the imitation of all kinds of aggressiveness.

Another important process stimulating aggressive behavior is *playing social roles*. Each culture is characterized by many social roles to which individuals must adjust. Some of the roles include aggressive behavior. The investigations (e.g. Bettelheim 1943) showed that SS guards in German concentration camps were not psychopaths but ordinary people (postmen, farmers, clerks etc.). It was the social role of guards which made them cruel. The same is true for the guards in the camps in Bosnia. Quite often they were even neighbours of the prisoners. In Milgram's and Zimbardo's experiments the subjects were asked to play certain social roles (teacher, prisoner, guard) to which they conformed irrespective of their values and attitudes.

Frustration and Induction

But neither genetic nor cultural factors together are sufficient for participation in a war. People must be frustrated, they must experience a profound stress (*frustration*). Wars break out in countries which undergo severe crises. Just before WW 2 Germany suffered an economic crisis with 60% unemployment rate, and 10 000% inflation. A severe economic and ethnic crisis appeared also in Yugoslavia and other communist countries before and after the fall of communism. In former Yugoslavia and some parts of the former Soviet Union it led to war because of unsolved conflicts among different national and religious groups. A great deal of it was transmitted aggressiveness (e.g. Muslims were not the real cause of distress of Serbian people).

Frustration mobilizes the inherited and cultural aggressive potentials and prepares people for fighting.

But even these three factors together (namely heredity, culture and frustration) are not sufficient for mass participation in a war. A release factor (*induction*) must be present too.

Wars are usually classified into offensive and defensive ones (although it is often hard to distinguish them). For a defensive war no strong induction is necessary since a country is attacked and the people have no other solution than fighting back. Yet even in such cases some propaganda and other means of psychological induction are necessary.

But mass participation in an offensive war is not possible without strong induction of people. To say that people are just forced to participate is too simple an answer. Forcing is not enough, although it is an important factor contributing to the level of frustration and hence war readiness. People must say »yes« to their leaders. They must be motivated and must believe that they are threatened and that the war is the only solution. They have to be willing to kill and to be killed. The main means of induction are propaganda, mass rallies, speeches, posters, rumors, promised rewards (e.g. medals, booty) and punishments (e.g. prison) for disobedience etc. Due to contemporary media (TV, telephone, e-mail etc.) propaganda spreads among people like an explosion.

Before a war starts, the authority tries to make people enthusiastic about it. Without sufficient preparation, it can happen that people resist it (e.g. mass protests against the Vietnam war in America and the refusal of some Russian soldiers to fight in Chechnia). Then the war is not successful or even possible.

During WW 1 the USA hesitated to join the allies because the public opinion was not yet ready for it. Neutralism prevailed among people. Only after strong propaganda was it possible to send the troops to Europe. Strong propaganda was necessary also for starting the Gulf War and the military interventions in Africa.

Before and during WW 2 the Nazi leaders were the great masters of propaganda. The people were bombed by tremendous propaganda which »drained the brains« of millions. At mass rallies they raised their hands and cried »Heil Hitler«. Doubtless, many of them participated because they were frightened, but the majority of them were enthusiastic about their leader. Fear leads to conformity (Zimbardo, 1970). Old films show their hysterical reactions, like shedding tears and even fainting.

In 1988-1991 the Serbs in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia organized rallies with several hundred thousand people calling for war. A million of Serbs gathered in Gaza Mes-tan in Kosovo, the site of the battle they lost to Turks 500

years before. The main slogan was: »Slobodane, give us the weapons!« Milošević, Karadžić and other leaders gave fighting speeches. Milošević promised that »nobody will beat the Serbian people« (the speech in Gaza Mestan in 1989) and Karadžić cried that the Serbian nation was a holy nation and that God himself was a Serb (the speech in Banja Luka in 1991). Since distressed, people are inclined to identify themselves with their »therapist« (psychiatrist Karadžić certainly knew it), their influence on the mass was great and profound.

Implicit propaganda can be even more effective than explicit one, since one cannot control it. Before WW 2 German youth was educated to feel superior in comparison to other nations and the 11th Olympic Games in Berlin were supposed to prove it (yet the Americans earned more medals and Hitler was very disappointed).

A group of psychologists and sociologists in Belgrade (Rosandić and Pešić, 1994) analyzed Serbian textbooks for elementary schools and discovered a high proportion of aggressive, fighting and warlike poems (58) and far fewer peaceful ones (14). Most poems extol heroism, patriotism and death and blame cowardice, peace and even life. One poem says:

A coward dies many times in his life,
but a hero only once.
The man who dies with honor
will be remembered for centuries;
but the man who dies without honor
is forgotten by his own children.
Our people are used to dying.
Death is consolation for them.
Here nobody who dies really dies,
since honest death is better than a shameful life.
A real hero doesn't die at home
and honored death glorifies his life.
It is better to die once
than to worship aliens for ever.
These graves aren't our coffins,
but the cradles of our new power.

After sufficient induction a war starts. As it continues, the induction becomes more and more intense. Due to isolation, excitement and despair, the people are easy prey to war propaganda. They participate more and more until they are engaged in the most cruel activities. A good example is the war in ex-Yugoslavia. In Slovenia in 1991, it was short and not cruel (45 people killed in 10 days), because it came suddenly without sufficient psychological preparation. In

Croatia in 1991-1992 it was more cruel and destructive (about 10 000 persons killed), and in Bosnia in 1993-1995, it was the most cruel and destructive (about 280 000 people killed). According to reporters, the soldiers even cut the people who were already dead, and shelled the houses which were already destroyed.

A war ends when one side suffers a military defeat (the Gulf War or the War for the Falkland Islands), or when human and/or material resources are exhausted (WW 1, the Balkan wars). Then the induction stops. Sometimes *exhaustion* appears only after years or even decades of fighting (e.g. the war between Iran and Iraq lasted for 8 years, and in the 17th century most of Europe fought for 30 years).

Implication of the Model for Peace

Peace policy can be effective only when it diminishes readiness for war, or, in other words, when it enhances readiness for peace. Both are negatively related; war amplifiers are peace reducers and war reducers are peace amplifiers. However, peace readiness is not just absence of war readiness, but a more active state of affairs.

It is certainly not possible to change human genetic equipment in a short-term period either by using the tools of genetic engineering or by selective mechanisms of evolution. The latter could have an effect only after a very long historical period. Most probably today's Scandinavians have the same or similar genome as the ancient terrible Vikings, and today's Turks as the ancient fearful Turks. But even if the genes do change, we have no way to interfere with them.

Both Konrad Lorenz and Sigmund Freud believed that the aggressive instinct could not be minimized, but that it could be transferred to some substitute and to a socially acceptable activity (e.g. sport or surgery). There are some Eskimo tribes that, when angry, practice beating a tree instead of each other. Yet there is no evidence that such substitution is effective also for larger groups (Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union much stimulated sport, and in former Yugoslavia, boxing and soccer, which was played in an aggressive way, were the most popular sports).

It is easier, though not easy, to influence culture and the national character. They change only gradually and slowly. But today the phase of changing is faster. There is some evidence that the German national character has changed after WW 2, and that Germans became less patriarchal, less obedient to authority, and more feminine. According to Erikson (1950), the German character was not interceptive and the military defeat and postwar situation could force them to »look into themselves«. Something similar is now

going on in Serbia and perhaps the character described by Cvijić at the beginning of the century is likewise changing.

The most effective instrument of peace policy could be the prevention of frustrating situations which arise in various parts of the world. People are the least prepared to participate in an offensive war in economically stable countries where the main needs as described by Maslow have been satisfied or at least not threatened, and where good relations among various ethnic, religious and class groups prevail (*well-being*).

Gorer (1964) investigated life habits of three peaceful tribes from New Guinea, the Himalayas and the Congo. Although they live in different parts of the world and in different environments, they all like friendship, sexual activity and food, they often laugh, do not know taboos and do not use torture. In other words: they are very little frustrated. On the other hand, the aggressive tribes (e.g. Spartans, Turks and some Indian tribes) used cruel initiation rites and instruments.

The citizens of autocratic countries are generally more frustrated than the citizens of democratic countries. Autocratic regimes frustrate many needs from Maslow's list of needs (Pečjak, 1955), e.g. the need for belonging because of prohibition to express national feelings among minorities.

Throughout history wars broke out only among autocratic countries or between an autocratic and a democratic country but not among two or more democratic countries. Except for small city republics in Greece and the Republic of Dubrovnik, all Balkan states have been very autocratic and often dictator-minded.

In the territory of former Yugoslavia the national and religious groups had fought among themselves throughout their history, but there was relative peace during Tito's period. After the fall of communism all these groups began to fight again. Why? One answer is that the conflicts among them had not settled down, having been merely covered by the official ideology of »brotherhood and unity«. In former Yugoslavia it was forbidden to speak about these problems because officially they did not exist. The same situation was in the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Only in Czechoslovakia the nations separated without a war, perhaps due to their different culture and a more peaceful national character.

According to the psychological model of war the most crucial phase is induction, since it enhances war readiness and initiates war participation. The process is very fast and reminds one of stampede.

Induction is mostly in the hands of political leaders. They encourage the rallies, they direct propaganda and deliver militant speeches. The political leader of Croatian Serbs, psychiatrist Jovan Rašković talking on Zagreb TV

(1991) openly admitted: »The people are becoming mad!« Is it possible to change the minds of such militant leaders as Saddam Hussein or Milošević and influence their decisions? Recent history shows that they do not change (Saddam Hussein) or they change only »five minutes after midnight« (Milošević).

To preserve peace the leaders should be controlled by democratic institutions, but it is not possible when the leaders govern them. In 1933, Hitler was elected by the German parliament. In 1990 (and several times later), Milošević likewise won in the Serbian parliament. Using strong induction the autocrats govern also the public.

Induction is opposed by anti-war and peace propaganda, peace movements and peaceful political models (anti-induction). In a country prepared for a war it is usually weaker than induction and therefore cannot prevent war. Besides, political leaders manipulate the people with a peaceful pose. Karadžić often stressed that he supported peace and that the Serbian army just defended its people.

Anti-war propaganda was especially strong in the USA during the Vietnam war, and it could have had some effect on peace negotiations.

In former Yugoslavia there were peace demonstrations in Sarajevo in 1992, and some demonstrators even entered Vukovar, which was already being attacked. But it was in vain. At that moment it was not possible to stop the war.

Anti-war propaganda and peace movement have grown in some former republics of Yugoslavia and especially in Belgrade during the last year. Although the opposition movement is slow and not unified, it is growing; eventually, it could prevent new possible outbreaks in Kosovo, Bosnia, Montenegro or anywhere else in former Yugoslavia. But firm and final peace could be established only after a generation. It is not easy to forget hundreds of thousands of dead countrymen, including friends and relatives.

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