

**Studying War: How The Way We Learn About War Changes The Way We
Do War**

By: Daniela Denyer Malo



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Introduction

1. Theoretical Foundations: Does knowledge about war influence how war is conducted?

This research is grounded in a central debate within International Relations and social theory: whether knowledge about war merely describes conflict, or actively shapes how war is conducted. Moving beyond materialist explanations that prioritise military capabilities and state interests, this study adopts a constructivist and critical perspective, arguing that war is not only fought physically, but also constructed intellectually through ideas, frameworks, and institutional knowledge systems.

At the core of this framework is constructivism in International Relations, which holds that the international system is shaped by shared ideas, identities, and norms rather than objective material forces alone. As Alexander Wendt famously argued, “anarchy is what states make of it,” emphasizing that political reality is not fixed but socially produced through interaction.

This perspective implies that how war is understood directly influences how it is practiced. Wendt’s observation that “500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the U.S. than 5 North Korean ones” illustrates that threat perception is constructed through identity and belief, not simply material capability. Extending this logic, the academic and institutional framing of war shapes what forms of violence are perceived as legitimate, rational, or inevitable.

The Social Construction of Violence

The concept of the social construction of violence suggests that violence is not only a physical act but also a socially mediated phenomenon, interpreted through cultural, scientific, and institutional lenses. While biological perspectives, such as those advanced by Adrian Raine, identify physiological correlates of aggression, including low arousal states and neurological predispositions, these explanations alone do not determine how violence is understood or justified at the societal level.

Rather, biological insights are themselves embedded within broader interpretive frameworks. Theories of aggression, including arousal-based models and neurobiological explanations (e.g., Eric Hickey), demonstrate that violence can be framed as natural, functional, or even necessary, thereby influencing how it is normalized within both academic and policy discourse. This intersection highlights that even ‘objective’ knowledge about violence contributes to shaping its legitimacy and meaning.

However, this tension also reflects a broader debate within war and violence studies between biological determinism and social constructionist approaches. While scholars such as Raine emphasise physiological predispositions toward aggression, these predispositions alone cannot explain why certain forms of violence emerge in specific historical and political contexts, nor why societies legitimize some forms of violence while condemning others. Biological capacity may help explain the potential for aggression, but the expression, organisation, and justification of violence remain deeply shaped by social structures, political narratives, and cultural norms. In the context of war, this distinction becomes particularly important, as collective violence requires not only individual aggression but also systems of ideological legitimisation, institutional authority, and social acceptance. Thus, rather than rejecting biological explanations entirely, social constructionist approaches situate them within wider political and cultural frameworks that shape how violence is understood and enacted.

Epistemology of War and Knowledge Production

Central to this study is the epistemology of war, understood as the set of assumptions, categories, and metrics through which societies interpret and evaluate conflict. John Tirman argues that dominant U.S. war knowledge has historically prioritized victory and strategic success over civilian harm, reflecting deeper cultural narratives such as the frontier myth and a 'just-world' belief system. This epistemological framework systematically marginalizes civilian suffering, rendering it peripheral to assessments of war outcomes.

This process is embedded within broader systems of security knowledge production, in which academic institutions, think tanks, and policy networks generate the conceptual tools used to analyse and justify war. Drawing on Michel Foucault, this research understands knowledge and power as mutually constitutive: the production of knowledge about war is itself a form of power that shapes political possibilities and limits moral scrutiny.

Framing and the Normalization of Violence

The normalization of violence occurs through processes of framing, which determine how conflict is perceived and interpreted. Christopher McIntosh conceptualizes war frames as ontological, meaning they define what counts as war, whose lives are considered "grievable," and which forms of violence are treated as routine.

Through repeated use in academic, media, and policy discourse, these frames transform exceptional acts of violence into ordinary and legitimate practices. For instance, the framing of the 'war on terror,' as analysed by Jeremy Lipschultz, functioned as a unifying narrative that legitimized a wide range of military actions while casting a shadow on their moral implications. Similarly, framing processes identified by Maximilian Granzow, Andreas Hasenclever, and Janina Sändig demonstrate how certain conflicts are constructed as inevitable or justified, while others are delegitimized.

These dynamics reveal that violence is not only enacted but continuously reproduced through discourse, becoming embedded in everyday political perception.

Strategic Culture and the Reproduction of War

Over time, these epistemological and framing processes contribute to the formation of strategic culture - the set of shared assumptions and habitual responses that guide a state's approach to conflict. Tirman links U.S. strategic culture to historical narratives of expansion and racialized perceptions of threat, which facilitate the projection of power with limited moral constraint. McIntosh further argues that persistent war framing creates a conceptual boundary between domestic and foreign violence, reinforcing a worldview in which military action is normalized as a primary policy tool.

In this sense, epistemology, framing, and strategic culture operate as a self-reinforcing system, shaping not only how war is understood but how it is conducted.

From Moral Question to Technical Problem

A key implication of this framework is the transformation of war from a moral issue into a technical one. Tirman highlights how contemporary war-making often relies on narrow, technocratic forms of

knowledge, such as game theory, statistical modelling, and weapons analysis, that abstract violence from its human consequences. Civilian casualties become quantifiable data rather than ethical concerns. In the context of nations that have long suffered through violence, such as Colombia, Mexico, or Sudan (in their own respective formats of violence), where violence has been historically pervasive, this abstraction is mirrored in public perception: repeated exposure to death in media and political discourse has led to a normalization of violence, where even multiple killings may no longer be perceived as constituting a ‘massacre.’ This suggests that the framing of violence not only shapes policy decisions but also conditions societal thresholds for moral outrage, rendering certain levels of human loss disturbingly routine.

Importantly, this normalization does not imply that all violent contexts are politically or historically equivalent. The dynamics of civil conflict in Colombia, cartel-related violence in Mexico, and mass atrocity in Sudan emerge from distinct social, political, and historical conditions. Rather, the comparison highlights a broader sociological pattern: prolonged exposure to violence can reshape public sensitivity to human suffering, gradually altering what societies perceive as exceptional, tolerable, or routine.

Similarly, McIntosh shows how war is framed as a continuous, bureaucratic process, while Lipschultz demonstrates how simplified narratives like the ‘war on terror’ reduce complex political realities into manageable, policy-driven categories and political campaigns. This technocratic framing removes moral judgment from decision-making processes, presenting violence as a rational, necessary, and solvable problem.

This theoretical framework leads to two central lines of inquiry:

- Do academic and institutional frameworks shape which forms of violence are perceived as legitimate or inevitable?
- To what extent is war framed as a technical problem rather than a moral choice?

By integrating constructivist theory with critical perspectives on knowledge production, this research argues that academic discourse does not merely analyse war, but it actively participates in constructing the conditions under which war becomes thinkable, acceptable, and actionable.

2. The Institutionalization of War Studies

Modern universities have progressively formalised the study of war, turning it into a distinct academic field within the humanities and social sciences. This development, particularly after the Second World War, led to the creation of specialised disciplines such as War Studies, with institutions like King’s College London at the forefront of systematically examining conflict and security.

The study of war has moved from ad-hoc historical accounts to a self-conscious academic field organized around specific concepts, journals, and research programmes. Scholars such as Butler (2009) and McIntosh (2022) argue that ‘frames of war’ are not only rhetorical devices but also ontological tools that structure what counts as war-relevant knowledge; their circulation in scholarly articles, policy reports and curricula legitimises a distinct discipline of war studies. This framing change fits conveniently with the ideas of Granzow, Hasenclever and Sändig, who interpret conflict by analyzing how groups justify and mobilize for violence and they integrate these ideas into mainstream academic study of civil wars, thereby providing a systematic methodological set of rules for how to

study and explain conflict that is taught and reproduced in university courses and research journals now.

That institutionalisation has been further reinforced by groups of academics that privilege state-centric, technical expertise. Cristiano et al. (2023) show how cybersecurity, once a peripheral sub-field, has been re-coded as a 'work-in-progress' with dedicated research centres, graduate programmes and policy-impact metrics, mirroring the broader pattern of war studies becoming a bounded academic market. At the same time, the 'epistemology of war' critique reveals that the field is shaped by American military and political institutions, which embed their own assumptions about civilian casualties and strategic necessity into the scholarly canon (Tirman, 2011).

As John Tirman (2011) argues, the dominant mode of producing knowledge about war is itself a product of American institutional power. He shows how narrow technical expertise - game theory during Vietnam, weapons-proliferation analysis for Iraq - was systematically privileged over historical and sociological understanding, producing frameworks that treated war as a set of quantifiable problems rather than human catastrophes. This 'epistemology of war in Washington,' as he calls it, relies on a single metric: success as defined by the state, with civilian death structurally excluded from the calculus. The result is a system of knowledge that evolved from four centuries of American expansion, one that renders the human costs of war impermissible as a politically consequential concern. Drawing on Said's orientalism critique, Tirman (2011) demonstrates that American social science became a form of domination in its own right, generating representations of target populations that legitimized violence while silencing the voices of those who endured it.

Together, these strands illustrate how war studies have been institutionalised through

- (1) the adoption of a framing grammar that defines research agendas,
- (2) the creation of disciplinary infrastructures, such as journals, conferences, and graduate curricula, and
- (3) the embedding of state-centric epistemologies that both enable and constrain critical inquiry.

3. From 'Frames of War' to an Institutional Discipline

Judith Butler shows that the very word *war* is a discursive frame that makes certain violences intelligible while rendering others invisible. The circulation of this frame – in policy speeches, media reports and scholarly articles – creates a temporal logic that repeatedly reproduces the idea of a war-time or peace-time, which can be mobilised for political ends. When scholars adopt the frame as an object of analysis, it becomes a research agenda: journals, conferences and graduate programmes are organised around 'war studies' as a field of research and study.

Cristiano et al. (2023) describe how this reflexive turn has been institutionalised in a newer sub-field: cybersecurity. The authors describe the emergence of an epistemic community, made up of research centres, funding streams, policy-impact metrics and a shared vocabulary, that now produces 'useful' knowledge for scholars and policy-makers. The same pattern can be seen in war studies: a community of security scholars, former practitioners and defence ministries co-author reports, teach courses, and define what counts as legitimate war-related knowledge.

4. The Military-Academic Complex (MIAC)

The ‘golden triangle’ of defence agencies, private arms firms and universities is the institutional substrate that channels the framing logic into dual-use research. Funding ties mean that research questions are often posed by military priorities such as AI-driven targeting or autonomous drones. Because the academic payoff (publications, grants, career advancement) is tied to these projects, the technological side-effects of war (surveillance, data-mining, lethal autonomous weapons) become normalised objects of study rather than extraordinary moral exceptions with real effects on human life. This mirrors the cyber-security case, where the ‘socio-technical divide’ is repeatedly foregrounded as a research problem to be solved for policy relevance.

Strategic studies deliberately bridge history, international relations theory and security analysis to advise governments on the use of force. Its interdisciplinary toolkit, which includes deterrence theory, crisis management, and simulations, is built on the same frames identified by Butler: war is a *politically necessary* and *technically manageable* activity. Because strategic-studies scholars are routinely invited to advise ministries, think tanks and organizations such as NATO, the academic framing of conflict is fed back into the very decisions that determine whether a crisis escalates into war. The ‘epistemology of war’ chapter shows how American public indifference to civilian casualties supplies an implicit licence for planners to pursue ‘what is necessary’ without democratic checks and accountability.

‘Defense intellectuals’ are the technocratic analysts who translate strategic-studies concepts into operational tools such as risk-assessment models or algorithmic targeting. Their work is highly quantitative, policy-oriented and often presented as value-free expertise. This technocratic framing strips war of its moral and political dimensions, presenting it instead as a set of optimisation problems. The same technocratic turn is evident in the cyber-security literature, where scholars stress “actionable models” and “policy relevance” at the expense of broader ethical debates.

Technological and political elites, driven by profit maximization, often disregard the broader societal consequences of their innovations, failing to recognise that these same dynamics can ultimately undermine their own long-term interests and experiences.

How the Way War Is Studied Shapes the Way It Is Waged

Process	From the literature	Effect on warfare
Framing (Butler)	War is a socially constructed, temporally bounded discourse.	Normalises the deployment of force when the frame is invoked by elites and marginalises ‘non-war’ forms of violence such as police

		repression and covert strikes.
Institutionalisation (Cristiano et al.)	Creation of an epistemic community with dedicated centres, funding, and metrics.	Aligns research output with military procurement cycles; accelerates the uptake of new technologies (AI, drones).
Military-Academic Complex	Funding and dual-use research tie universities to defence priorities.	Embeds militarised knowledge production inside the academy, making war-related technologies, such as autonomous weapons, appear as ordinary scientific progress.
Strategic Studies	Policy-oriented, interdisciplinary, directly consulted by governments.	Supplies the conceptual vocabulary (deterrence, 'extended nuclear umbrella', 'strategic stability') that policymakers use to justify escalation or new arms races.
Defense Intellectuals / Technocratic Analysis	Emphasis on quantitative, 'objective' models of conflict.	Turns war into a technical problem (focusing on target selection, risk calculation, etc.), which can be outsourced to algorithms and thus depoliticised.

Because each of these layers reinforces the others, the institutionalisation of war studies does not merely describe conflict, but rather it actively reproduces a self-sustaining ecosystem in which research agendas are set by defence funding, therefore academic frames (war as a technical,

policy-relevant problem) are taught to students. In turn, strategic-studies experts translate those frames into national security doctrine, leading to defense intellectuals operationalising the doctrine with algorithms and weapons systems. This, finally, leads to policy outcomes (e.g., new nuclear postures, AI-driven targeting) closing this loop by generating new research questions for the academic community.

In this loop, the *way war is studied* becomes a decisive factor in *how war is waged*: the more war is cast as a neutral, technocratic field, the easier it is to expand the scope of violence (new domains such as cyberspace, autonomous weapons, and “low-intensity” drone strikes) without provoking the moral or democratic scrutiny that would arise if the same phenomena were framed as “human rights violations” or “civilian massacres.”

4. The Possibility of Counter-Frames

However some scholars also hint at openings and possible solutions. Granzow, Hasenclever and Sändig show that collective-action frames can either mobilise or demobilise violence depending on how resonant they are with local grievances. In the same way, Butler’s analysis of the *temporal* dimension of war frames suggests that ruptures, or moments when the dominant ‘war’ narrative is contested, can produce ‘heterotemporality’ and open space for alternative, peace-oriented research agendas. If universities deliberately cultivate critical, interdisciplinary programmes that foreground civilian harms, humanitarian law, and the politics of knowledge production, the MIAC loop can be weakened and the technocratic veneer of war can be stripped away.

War studies have become an institutionalised field through the convergence of framing logic, epistemic communities, strategic-studies policy advice, and the military-academic complex. This institutional architecture does not merely observe conflict, it also shapes the *possibility* and *character* of conflict itself. Changing the frames, funding structures, and disciplinary incentives is therefore a prerequisite for altering how war is actually fought, or even for preventing certain wars from being launched at all.

5. Classical war theory often frames violence as rational and necessary

Classical war theory, particularly in the work of Carl von Clausewitz in *On War*, frames violence as a rational instrument embedded within statecraft. War is not treated as an aberration, but as a continuation of political interaction through different means: a tool among diplomacy, economics, and negotiation for achieving state objectives. In this view, the nation-state possesses a repertoire of ‘grammars’ through which it communicates its interests, with war emerging when other forms of political exchange fail. Violence, therefore, is not inherently chaotic or immoral, but is conceptualised as purposeful, strategic, and subordinated to political logic. This framing situates war within a broader system of rational decision-making, where its use becomes intelligible—even necessary—under certain conditions.

Building on this tradition, modern strategic thought further reinforces the idea of war as a calculated and manageable phenomenon. By integrating military force into a wider framework of grand strategy, scholars and practitioners treat conflict as a problem of coordination between different instruments of power rather than a fundamentally moral rupture. This perspective abstracts violence into questions of efficiency, timing, and optimisation, aligning it with technical and policy-oriented analysis. As a result, war becomes less a question of ethical judgment and more a matter of strategic necessity,

where the use of force is evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in achieving political ends rather than its human cost.

6. How did the Cold War academic institutions train analysts to design nuclear strategy and military doctrine?

Porter shows that once the Cold War's bipolar order collapsed, a new 'strategic-science' logic took over. British and U.S. officials treated war as a calculable policy problem: they spoke of 'preventive war,' 'regime change' and a 'law of the instrument' that turned massive force into a technical solution rather than a moral choice (Porter, 2018, p. 36). This logic was underpinned by a unipolar system that gave the United States the material capacity to make such calculations appear feasible (Porter, 2018, p. 33), and by a set of unquestioned ideas, such as fear after 9/11 and confidence in U.S. power, that locked decision-makers onto a 'wandering course to a fixed end' - the fixed end being a violent one (Porter, 2018).

The same framing of violence as a rational, necessary instrument is described by McIntosh (2022, p. 518): war-frames 'make certain acts of political violence appear normal and inevitable,' allowing states to present extraordinary killing as ordinary security practice. By presenting war as a scientific, objective enterprise, these frames mute ethical scrutiny and make mass destruction easier to justify. Zala (2019) similarly notes that the post-Cold-War strategic-science model, the one focused on new weapons, cyber-tools, and quantitative risk-assessment, removes the "taboo" that once restrained nuclear and conventional war, thereby 'making the use of overwhelming force seem rational and necessary'.

Roberts (2010), by contrast, emphasizes that the end of the Cold War was produced by internal Soviet decay, Gorbachev's reformist leadership, and a shift in ideas toward cooperation rather than confrontation. The post-Cold-War triumphalist narrative that 'liberal democracy had won' (a point noted in the summary of his work) reinforced the confidence that the same strategic-science mindset could be deployed in new interventions, which was exactly the mindset that Porter identified as driving the Iraq War and other interventions of the same nature.

Cold-War-era academic institutions, including RAND, Harvard, the Institute for Defense Analyses, and others, trained analysts to model nuclear deterrence and doctrine, embedding the notion that war could be reduced to formulas and cost-benefit tables. Classical war theory, with its Clausewitzian view of violence as a rational means to political ends, supplied the intellectual vocabulary for this transformation. Together, these traditions turned large-scale violence into a technically rational choice, smoothing the path for the mass destruction justified in Iraq.

7. Did turning war into a strategic science make mass destruction easier to justify?

When war is recast as a strategic science, violence is no longer presented as a moral or political tragedy but as a calculable, technical problem. Porter shows that after the Cold-War bipolar order collapsed, British and U.S. leaders treated the Iraq invasion as a 'preventive' operation that could be planned, cost and executed like any large-scale engineering project. Their decisions rested on a set of unexamined ideas, like fear of terrorism and confidence in unrivaled U.S. power, combined with a belief that a unipolar system made such massive force feasible (2018, including p. 36). McIntosh (2022) also demonstrates how war-frames turn specific acts of violence into ordinary, intelligible policy tools. By assigning normative valence to certain lives and portraying large-scale killing as an

inevitable part of 'the war on terror,' these frames make mass destruction appear normal and necessary.

The same logic appears in broader reflections on the epistemology of war: scholars note that the 'narrow constructions of technical knowledge' that underpinned Cold-War deterrence were later applied to conventional conflicts, producing incredibly destructive results because they were separated from moral or historical context. Thus, the transformation of war into a discipline of strategy, modeling, and risk-assessment stripped it of ethical scrutiny, allowing policymakers to justify the use of overwhelming firepower and, ultimately, mass destruction.

Other scholars reach the same conclusion: once war is turned into a calculable science, the moral barrier to massive killing erodes. Tirman (2011, p. 352) argues that the U.S. frontier myth and the 'psychic numbing' produced by strategic narratives let societies treat huge civilian casualties as invisible statistics, a mental shortcut that makes mass destruction cognitively bearable - an effect that is also seen in communities that have suffered through long violent periods of time to the point of normalization. Lipschultz (2007) also documents how the 'war-on-terror' frame turned multiple security actions into a single, morally sanctioned campaign, allowing the United States and its allies to justify extraordinary violence as a logical extension of a declared war - perhaps in a similar way to the one used in imperialist times by other powers. Constructivist accounts, such as Sarina Theys' (2018) remind us that these scientific rationalisations are socially constructed ideas that shape what policymakers deem acceptable. Together, these works suggest that the conversion of war into a strategic discipline, full of models, probabilities and so-called 'objective' calculations, creates a cognitive and normative environment in which mass destruction can be justified as a rational, technical solution rather than a moral choice. When this is taught to those entering the world of politics and international relations, the outcome is generations of politicians and global leaders - both those previously and currently in power and the coming generations - that war is not only unavoidable but even necessary.

Policy Recommendations

1: Create an Independent Strategic-Ethics Review Board

A statutory body should evaluate not only the feasibility of major military operations but also the moral framing of a campaign before any preventive or regime-change plan is approved. As Porter demonstrates, Britain's decision to invade Iraq was driven by "a particular blend of fear and confidence" that went largely unchallenged, rooted in "a set of ideas about how best to pursue security, ideas enabled by the capabilities of the US," which remained "insulated and taken for granted." (1) The war flowed from what Porter calls "a preventive war" logic, which "typically flows from a particular alchemy of fear and confidence." (2) An independent ethics board would force those underlying assumptions to be surfaced, aired, and contested before the momentum toward conflict becomes irreversible.

2: Institutionalise Red-Team Scenario Testing with Non-War Pathways

Defence and foreign-policy bodies should routinely commission red-team exercises that explicitly explore alternative narratives and non-war pathways. McIntosh argues that the frames through which political violence is understood as "war" make that violence appear natural and inevitable: when events are temporally framed as part of an ongoing war, "the violence of the past appears to inevitably

end in the present and near future." (3) A red team operating from a peace-first frame can break that narrative, exposing hidden costs and alternative trajectories that are invisible once the war frame has locked in.

3: Mandate Systematic Idea-Impact Audits in Defence Ministries

Analysts should be required to map the underlying ideas (e.g. "terror equals war," "unipolar power enables pre-emptive action," "regime change is transformative", etc.) that shape policy options. Porter's core argument is that "ideas enabled by the capabilities of the US created the warpath" and that "a set of basic assumptions, and the logic of preventive and coalition war, went unexamined, and proved decisive." (1) Auditing those beliefs makes them visible and contestable, countering the tendency Porter identifies for "small, insulated groups" to bypass public deliberation. (4)

4: Decouple Nuclear and Strategic Doctrine from Conventional War Planning

Nuclear deterrence should remain a distinct, political tool, not a technical shortcut applied to conventional conflicts. McIntosh shows that frames of war possess a temporal dimension that normalises massive force - they "possess normative valence, identify which lives are 'grievable,' and subject select bodies to violence in ways that others are not." (5) When the same strategic-science language is applied across nuclear and conventional domains, the temporal logic of permanent war preparedness can erode the threshold that has historically kept nuclear weapons politically off-limits.

5: Introduce Mandatory Historical-Context Modules for Senior Officers

Senior military and diplomatic personnel should study how past strategic-science projects - such as Cold War deterrence theory, the Iraq intervention - have shaped contemporary institutional norms. Porter traces "the wandering course to a fixed end" by which decision-makers, having mobilised for war, found that "the reputational costs of standing down" grew with each step, creating a path dependency that became politically costly to reverse (6, 7). Understanding that trajectory equips leaders to recognise when inertia, not strategy, is driving the next decision point.

6: Strengthen Parliamentary Oversight of Strategic-Science Research Contracts

Governments should require public disclosure of assumptions, data sources, and scenario outcomes for research contracts issued to think tanks and defence consultancies. As the cybersecurity literature documents, early strategic-science research produced by U.S. think tanks and war colleges was often designed less to contribute to academic debate and more to reinforce threat perceptions and support complex policy decision-making. (8) In this environment, the policy discussions were dominated by disastrous scenarios, with "minor, mostly non-politically motivated incidents cast as harbingers of certain doom." (9) Transparency would counter the tendency of closed expert networks to normalise worst-case assumptions as the only rational basis for action.

7: Diversify Security Research Funding Frameworks

Grant support should be directed toward scholars exploring non-militaristic approaches to security, including human security, climate security, and cooperative security. Constructivist perspectives suggest that the end of the Cold War was shaped not only by states and institutions, but also by ordinary people and the emergence of more cooperative ideas centred on shared human interests (10). Creating space for these alternative perspectives is especially important because, before the Iraq War,

confidence in the West's ability to reshape international conditions often overshadowed more cautious and restraint-oriented approaches (11).

8: Implement Mass-Destruction Impact Statements

Any military operation likely to result in large-scale civilian casualties should require a public impact assessment, similar to environmental impact statements. Tirman argues that the American war style has developed systems of knowledge that often marginalise the human costs of conflict, particularly during wartime (12). McIntosh similarly shows that dominant war frames shape which forms of violence are treated as exceptional and which become normalized or politically invisible (13). Requiring public impact assessments would force policymakers to confront the likely civilian consequences of military action before violence is framed as inevitable or strategically necessary.

9: Establish a Strategic-Science Accountability Registry

All models, simulations, and risk assessments used to justify military force should be archived, peer-reviewed, and regularly audited. Tirman argues that highly technical forms of knowledge can produce destructive outcomes when they are detached from historical, political, and social context (14). Porter similarly warns that overly abstract strategic thinking can allow simplistic assumptions to go unchallenged while obscuring the complexity of real conflicts (15). Greater transparency and scrutiny would help prevent scientific and technical expertise from being used to legitimise poorly examined political decisions.

10: Promote Joint Civil-Society-Military Dialogues on Security Strategy

National security processes should give NGOs, academic experts, and victim-advocacy groups a seat at the table when strategic assessments are drafted. McIntosh argues that frames of war "govern what we analytically explore as war and determine the production of knowledge about war and peace," but adds that "by intervening in the frame's reproduction we can interrupt sovereign ways of representing violence, making nonviolent politics more visible, thinkable, and politically realizable" (13, 16). Civil-society inclusion diversifies the framing, challenges militaristic default narratives, and raises the political cost of mass destruction.

11: Reform Research Funding and Institutional Incentives

Governments and universities should rebalance funding structures to reduce dependence on military and defence-linked financing. This means increasing public support for peace studies and conflict prevention, mandating transparency in defence-research partnerships, and introducing ethical review boards for dual-use research - AI, surveillance, weapons systems. Joseph demonstrates that mainstream security discourse is state-centric, with media and research institutions tending to "stress issues of national or state security, even if it is at the cost of human security or the human rights concerns of the people" (17). If funding shapes research priorities, diversifying the funding base reduces the structural bias toward militarised knowledge production and opens space for alternative security paradigms (18).

12: Integrate Ethical and Civilian-Centric Frameworks into War Studies Curricula

Academic institutions should systematically embed ethical analysis and civilian-impact assessment into strategic studies programs: mandatory modules on civilian harm and international humanitarian

law, case-based teaching foregrounding civilian experiences, and interdisciplinary collaboration with peace studies and critical security studies. As Broache and colleagues demonstrate, widely used conflict data "may reproduce and amplify statist bias in conflict reporting, unintentionally laundering incidents of state-perpetrated violence" through coding protocols that "privilege government narratives of violence" (19, 20). Changing how future analysts are trained affects how they conceptualise and justify the use of force.

13: Diversify Epistemic Communities and Knowledge Production

Policymaking and academic discourse should incorporate perspectives from conflict-affected regions and non-Western scholars. This means including Global South researchers in policy-advisory roles, supporting local knowledge production in conflict zones, and encouraging framing that highlights civilian narratives and lived experiences. Tirman draws on the orientalism critique to show how American social science became "a form of domination itself - in effect, the control of information and ways of understanding the region and people" - with "the voices of the Koreans, Vietnamese, and Iraqis themselves" systematically unheard or discounted (21, 22). Joseph similarly calls for "delinking of news frames from its preoccupation with the dominant traditional state security perspective" (18). Broadening who produces knowledge about war disrupts the frames that normalise violence and recenters its human consequences.

Footnotes:

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Conclusion:

Altering how war is studied, through funding, education, and representation, is essential to reshaping how it is understood, justified, and ultimately conducted. As this research has demonstrated, war is not simply the product of material capabilities or strategic necessity, but also of the intellectual and institutional frameworks that define what forms of violence appear rational, legitimate, or inevitable. The ways in which universities, think tanks, policymakers, and strategic experts produce knowledge

about conflict directly shape the political and moral boundaries within which decisions about war are made.

When war is framed primarily through technical models, strategic calculations, and state-centric assumptions, its human consequences risk becoming abstracted and politically invisible. Civilian deaths become statistics, violence becomes bureaucratised, and military escalation is increasingly treated as a problem of efficiency rather than ethics. In this sense, the institutionalisation of war studies and strategic-science approaches has not merely analysed conflict, but contributed to normalising and reproducing particular forms of organised violence.

At the same time, this also means that alternative forms of knowledge production can create alternative political possibilities. Expanding space for critical perspectives, humanitarian frameworks, and non-militarised understandings of security can challenge the assumptions that sustain cycles of violence. Reforming funding structures, diversifying epistemic communities, foregrounding civilian experiences, and embedding ethical reflection within strategic studies are therefore not simply academic reforms, but necessary political interventions.

Ultimately, the way societies study war influences the way societies wage war. If the dominant frameworks surrounding conflict remain narrowly technocratic and militarised, the threshold for violence may continue to erode. However, if war is re-centred as a profoundly human, political, and moral issue rather than merely a strategic or technical one, new possibilities for restraint, accountability, and peace become more imaginable and more achievable.

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