

## Total War

War had changed long before the 20th century. With civilization, war lost its ritual characteristics. It became more commonly an all-out battle, using any tactics and weapons that would aid in victory. In other words, war became less restrained than it had been among more "primitive" peoples, who often used bluff and scare more than all-out violence.

The 20th century most clearly saw the introduction of a fundamentally new kind of war: *total war*, in which vast resources and emotional commitments of the belligerent nations were marshaled to support military effort. The two world wars were thus novel not only in their geographic sweep but in their mobilization of the major combatants. The features of total war also colored other forms of struggle, helping to explain brutal guerrilla and terrorist acts by groups not powerful enough to mount total wars but nonetheless affected by their methods and passions.

Total war resulted from the impact of industrialization on military effort, reflecting both the technological innovation and the organizational capacity that accompanied the industrial economy. Key steps in the development of total war thus emerged in the West from the end of the 18th century. The French Revolution, building new power for the state in contact with ordinary citizens, introduced mass conscription of men, forming larger armies than had ever before been possible. New citizen involvement was reflected in incitements to nationalism and stirring military songs, including aggressive national anthems—a new idea in itself. Industrial technology was first applied to war on a large scale in the American Civil War. Railroads allowed wider movement of mass armies, and mass-produced guns and artillery made a mockery of earlier cavalry charges and redefined the kind of personal bravery needed to fight in war.

However, it was World War I that fully revealed the nature of total war. Steadily more destructive technology included battleships, submarines, tanks, airplanes, poison gas (which had been banned by international agreement before the war), machine guns, and long-range artillery.

Organization for war included not only massive, compulsory recruitment—the draft—but also government control of economic activity via obligatory planning and rationing. It included unprecedented control of media, not only through effective censorship and the jailing of dissidents but through powerful propaganda designed to incite passionate, all-out commitment to the national cause and deep, unreasoned hatred of the enemy. Vivid posters, flaming speeches, and outright falsehood were combined in the emotional mobilization effort. All of these features returned with a vengeance in World War II, from the new technology of bombing, rocketry, and ultimately the atomic bomb to the enhanced economic mobilization organized by government planners.

The people most affected by the character of total war were the troops themselves, who directly endured—bled from and died from—the new technology. But one measure of total war was a blurring of the distinction between military and civilians, a distinction that had often limited war's impact earlier in world history. Whole civilian populations, not just those unfortunate enough to be near the front lines, were forced into certain types of work and urged to certain types of beliefs. The bombing raids, including the German rockets directed against British cities late in World War II, subjected civilians to some of the most lethal weapons available, as many belligerents deliberately focused their attacks on densely populated cities. Correspondingly, psychological suffering, though less common among civilians than among front-line soldiers, could spread throughout the populations involved in war.

Total war, like any major historical development, had mixed results. Greater government economic direction often included new measures to protect workers and give them a voice on management boards. Mobilization of the labor force often produced at least temporary breakthroughs for women. And intense efforts to organize technological research often produced side effects of more general economic benefit, such as the invention of synthetic rubber and other new materials.

Still, total war was notable especially for its devastation. The idea of throwing all possible

resources into a military effort made war more economically disruptive than had been the case before. The possibilities unleashed in total war produced embittered veterans who might vent their anger by attacking established political values. It certainly made postwar diplomacy more difficult. One result of total war was a tendency for the victor to be inflexible in negotiations at war's end: People who fought so hard found it difficult to treat enemies generously. The results of a quest for vengeance often produced new tensions that led directly, and quickly, to further conflict. War-induced passions and disruptions could also spark new violence at home, as crime rates often soared not only right after the war ended (a traditional result) but more durably. Children's toys started to reflect the most modern weaponry. How much of the nature of 20th-century life has been determined by the consequences of total war?

**QUESTIONS:** Fully answer each of the following questions based on the reading, in your notebook.

1. Define what is meant by "total war"?
2. In what way has total war, as it developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had an effect on the development of terrorism?
3. The article states that total war began to emerge in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century:
  - What did the French Revolution contribute to the idea of total war?
  - What did the U.S. Civil War contribute?
4. Identify ALL the reasons (make a bulletpoint list) as to why World War I is regarded as the first truly total war.
5. How did the experience of total war affect social and political patterns after the war's end? Why do many historians believe that total war made rational peacetime settlements more difficult than did earlier types of warfare?