

Casualty Aversion In Tepid War

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The end of the twentieth century was characterized by a large increase in the number of military interventions around the world. The framework of military missions has considerably broadened and the scope of missions now embraces many new dimensions, from the fight against terrorism to peace support operations. Technology, as an enabler, tends to hide the role played by people. Man, because he is mortal and irreplaceable, remains absolutely central to the conduct of war. As Martin van Creveld states: “Armed conflict will be waged by men on earth, not robots in space.”² Hence the eternal problem that commitment—true commitment to the point of death—cannot and must not be avoided. Casualty aversion appears to be a factor that increasingly shapes ideas within this debate. Although this phenomenon is often mentioned, the idea may not actually be very clear in many minds. The aim of this paper will be to lead the reader on a hunt to discover the roots of the concept of casualty aversion. It will demonstrate that casualty aversion cannot be understood and appreciated by a mere description of its symptoms, but that its true origins lie in the relationship between societies, violence, and death.

There are several definitions of this phenomenon, some of them very restrictive. This discussion will define the phenomenon as follows: casualty aversion is a mind-set exhibited by certain actors within society that is characterized by a fierce reluctance to commit military forces as soon as there is a risk of death. In accordance with ideas found in the current literature on this topic, the phenomenon will be designated either as casualty aversion, casualty phobia, or even as a concept of zero-deaths, as suggested by the literal French translation of the term.

An initial glance at the three pillars of society—the government, the media, and the public—will provide the background for discovering the manifestations of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, this external perspective, looking at its manifestations rather than its origins, will provide few keys to understanding. For that, the reader will need to drill down, stratum by stratum, as an explorer in a cave would do, trying to go deeper and deeper in search of the original source. At this point the fundamental questions will be asked: why does casualty aversion exist, and what are its roots? To answer this it will be necessary to draw on both philosophy and religion to see what they can bring to the explanation. Finally, after having found possible sources, the exploration will describe certain key factors that, even

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² Martin van Creveld, *On Future War* (London: Brassey, 1991), 212.

if they are not original causes, are critical enablers that render casualty aversion possible.

The methodology of research for this essay is in accordance with the framework depicted above. The existing manifestations of this phenomenon at the end of the twentieth century have limited the study to Western societies. However, this limitation on scope does not exclude the possibility of finding casualty phobia in other societies. Furthermore, although analysis of certain key elements demonstrates differences between certain Western nations, the liberal democracies, which are predominantly Christian societies, will be considered as a whole. The documentary sources can be divided into two main categories. First, the majority are Anglophone articles, mainly from the U.S., that generally remain at the level of a description of the symptoms. Second, the reading of analyses on war, death, and violence, notably *Essai sur l'Expérience de la Mort et le Problème Moral du Suicide* (Essay on the Experience of Death and the Moral Problem of Suicide) by Paul Louis Landsberg and *Essais sur la Philosophie de la Guerre* (Essays on the Philosophy of War) by Alexis Philonenko. They led the research for this essay to focus on particular core philosophers and religious texts. It is not only a question of addressing the works of Hegel, Tolstoy, or Kant, or commenting on the Bible, the Koran, or the Bhagavad Gita, but actually analyzing these major texts with a lens aimed at finding the sources of casualty aversion. The texts used are the French translations of original works (Hegel, Tolstoy, Kant), the thoughts and treatises of French philosophers (Proudhon, Tocqueville) and, finally, French thinkers that have analyzed violence, the sacred, and the experience of death (Girard, Philonenko, Herbert, Aron, Sorel, and Landsberg).

Part One: Manifestations of casualty aversion

The initial approach consists of a review of the three pillars of government, the media, and the public to examine where casualty phobia can lie and what its current manifestations are.

Government and casualty aversion

The current security environment has forced governments to take this new factor of casualty aversion into account. Global frameworks have changed, and now military missions are increasingly diversified. It is clear that the experiences of peace support operations in the 1990s still have tremendous consequences for current policy; as one writer has noted, “Mogadishu continues to haunt the way policy makers think today.”³ Governments have adapted their doctrine to fit this new context. The U.K. Strategic Defence Review and the U.K. Future Strategic Context for Defence give frameworks for military actions. Casualty aversion is mentioned in terms of force protection during limited wars. The U.S. National Se-

³ Cory Dauber, “The Impact of Mogadishu on U.S. Military Intervention,” *Armed Forces and Society* (Winter 2001), 11.

curity Strategy is clearer in this regard. Use of military forces “will entail minimal risk to American lives” when used for humanitarian missions.⁴ In this way, casualty aversion has entered the doctrines of world militaries. It has found its place in humanitarian action, or more generally, when the vital interests of a nation are not at stake. This distinction was emphasized by the attitude of the U.S. following September 11, 2001. When it comes to protecting vital interests, soldiers’ lives are viewed in a different way. After three U.S. soldiers died in Afghanistan in November 2001, President Bush said the victims were “heroes who died for a noble and just cause.”⁵ When it comes to preserving vital interests, a commitment until death appears to be accepted by governments. Casualty aversion does not occur in those conditions.

In a speech to the Chicago Economic Club entitled “Doctrine of the International Community,” Tony Blair mentioned five tests for the U.K. to apply before any military commitment. The third one is that there must be “sensible and prudent” options available for effective intervention.⁶ This kind of test is very similar in spirit to the six tests of the U.S. “Weinberger Doctrine” that guided U.S. involvements during the 1990s.⁷ These tests present critical criteria that need to be fulfilled prior to any use of force. Also, they both concede the importance of consensus within the nation. At this point, it is easy to foresee that casualty aversion is not only a governmental problem. Hence, as Weinberger states, fighting in the current context will require a high level of public support. This assumption, largely driven by the U.S. experience in the Vietnam War, directly involves the public as a major actor in this debate. Charles Reiss, in February 2001, related elements of the Future Strategic Context for Defence to this: “The armed forces, both in peacetime and on operations, will come under greater public and pressure group scrutiny.”⁸ Through this type of attitude, governments seem to project casualty phobia onto the public, and treat it as if it is a weakness in the nation to be fought. The media are the other foci of attention for these concerns in governments. Reiss mentions “the pressure from public opinion and the media for minimum casualties.”⁹ This is perfectly illustrated by the declaration of U.S. General Wesley Clark after the Kosovo campaign: “When you start to lose these expensive machines (aircraft), the countdown starts against you. The headlines begin to shout, ‘NATO loses a

⁴ *U.S. National Security Strategy for a New Century*, The White House, December 1999, 20.

⁵ Speech by President Bush, reported in *The Independent*, December 7, 2001.

⁶ Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, “Doctrine of the International Community,” speech delivered to the Economic Club of Chicago, Washington D.C., April 22, 1999, 22.

⁷ The Weinberger Doctrine is depicted by M. I. Handel in “Masters of War,” Appendix B, in *Classical Strategic Thoughts*, 3rd ed. (London/Portland: Frank Cass, 2001). Specifically, the six tests are mentioned on 310–311.

⁸ Charles Reiss, “Britain Must Wage War With No Casualties,” *Evening Standard*, February 7, 2001.

⁹ *Ibid.*

second aircraft,' and the people ask, 'How long can this go on?'"¹⁰ Therefore, although governments recognize casualty aversion, they tend to attribute the pressure behind the phenomenon to the media and the public.

The media and casualty aversion

To deal with the media and casualty phobia first requires defining what the media actually are. They represent both a group and a means. As a group, their interests lie with having the best headlines to boost sales. As a means, their goal is to transmit information and frequently to provide analysis. It is acknowledged that their powers have significantly increased, and many media outlets now have a worldwide scope, from their sources (journalists) to their destinations (multiplicity of information means).

To say that the media as a group are casualty averse is untrue. They are so diversified that they cannot be classified into a particular category. As a means, they are the main tool by which concepts of casualty aversion are spread. Above all, they want stories and, if possible, human stories. The thesis of Cory Dauber, who attributes "casualty shyness" to the people and casualty aversion to the media, goes further. The power of imagery is at the center of the phenomenon. Particularly, a presumption of public support "can become irrelevant in an instant if the wrong image comes over the wires."¹¹ Actually, the media produce a "metaphorical" effect. All arguments are centered on human bodies and, through a metaphor, these people become identified with the nation itself. Furthermore, the media sets the context in that they participate in the actual political debate.¹² If they have no story to relate, they will create one. This gives them an incredible power, especially when a government's strategy is weak or incoherent. Vietnam is considered to be the first direct TV war, where the media found a space for themselves in the lack of clarity provided by the American leadership.

Finally, the media find their legitimacy in the truth they bring. Transmitting polls and surveys, they reflect public opinion. Nevertheless, they can—deliberately or not—lead the people in an opposite direction to that exhibited by their initial will. Steven Kull and Clay Ramsay relate how the *New York Times*, on October 8, 1993, reported that "public opinion polls indicate that most Americans favor withdrawal" from Mogadishu. This wish for immediate withdrawal was in fact the opposite of the results of the surveys.¹³ Hence, the media as a group cannot be defined as casualty averse. As a means, they highlight casualty aversion

¹⁰ General Wesley Clark, "The United States and NATO: the way ahead," *Parameters* 29:4 (Winter 1999–2000), 8–9.

¹¹ Dauber, *op.cit.*, 2.

¹² Dauber, *op.cit.*, 3–6. Cory Dauber develops these ideas when she deals with media and casualty aversion.

¹³ S. Kull and C. Ramsay, *The Myth of the Reactive Public: American Public Attitudes on Military Fatalities in the Post Cold War Period* (London: Routledge, 2001), 208.

whether it comes from political leaders or from the public, and, for them, casualty phobia lies in the public or among governments.

The public and casualty aversion

After governments and the media, it is necessary to explore whether casualty phobia exists among the people. Susan Herbst defines public opinion as “a symbol, a rhetorical being referred to by legislative professionals and journalists in their conversation with each other.”¹⁴ At first, the public seems to be the favorite source to which to attribute casualty aversion. Nevertheless, this is an assumption that is too easy to make. For example, several studies exist stating that the public is not casualty averse at all. In *The Myth of the Reactive Public*, Kull and Ramsay conduct an in-depth analysis of surveys done during recent conflicts. The results of this study are simple: the public is much more robust regarding casualties than initially expected. In particular, they reach this conclusion for the Gulf War, the crisis in Mogadishu, and the attack against the U.S. Marines barracks in Lebanon in 1986. After the images of the incident in Somalia were seen, the public wanted more U.S. involvement and retaliation.¹⁵ Likewise, U.S. public support reached its peak when severe losses occurred in the Gulf War and in the days following the terrorist attack in Lebanon. Dealing with the Vietnam War, Jeffrey Record comes to this surprising conclusion: “In retrospect, it is amazing that public support remained as strong as long as it did, given the war’s geographic remoteness and the predominantly abstract quality of declared U.S. war aims.”¹⁶ Initially, the polls were clear: the public did not respond by demanding an immediate withdrawal. Furthermore, they describe the misperceptions of the public with regard to the number of casualties. Their starting point for this study was a PIPA survey in 1999, where American people estimated that 172 U.S. soldiers died in Bosnia, whereas the U.S. actually had no casualties. This survey envisaged different scenarios of degradation. Each time, the public responded with a large majority demonstrating a will to reinforce or to retaliate. A similar survey by PIPA, in 1999, leads to the same conclusions.

Now, knowing that the public is basically not casualty averse, the question remains: How does the public react to casualties? Here again, there exist several studies. The most common descriptions show the public analyzing each situation in terms of interests and satisfactory resolutions,¹⁷ or through weighing the costs versus the benefits.¹⁸ Notions of time, decisive actions,¹⁹ and the idea of

¹⁴ Dauber, op.cit., 14. Taken from Susan Herbst, *Reading the Public Opinion: How Political Actors View The Democratic Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Kull and Ramsay, op.cit, 212.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Record, “Force Protection Fetishism,” *Aerospace Power Journal* (Summer 2000): 5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: the Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for US Military Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996), 1.

¹⁹ Record, op.cit., 4.

“marginal” or “cumulative” casualties are taken into account.²⁰ Finally, Larson presents certainly one of the more comprehensive models to assess public behavior. Larson argues that casualty aversion is in fact a calculation of perceived benefit. His model, “ends and means,” includes five factors:²¹

1. Perceived benefit of the intervention;
2. Prospect for success;
3. Prospective and actual cost;
4. Changing expectations;
5. Leadership and cues from political leaders.

According to Larson, the U.S. has not become more casualty averse since World War II. Public support may vary in accordance with each operation, however, but support related to the benefit always remains the same. The fifth point, leadership and cues from political leaders, introduces the notion of democratic conversation. This phenomenon consists of the ability of an efficient leadership to shape the debate, relying on certain forms of co-operation with the media. With such a communication strategy, the public therefore seems well-conditioned and oriented by political leaders. The circle has now been completed, and the analysis comes back to the original point of departure: the government.

Results of the first analysis of government, the media, and the public

After having hunted for casualty aversion among the three pillars of society—government, the media, and the public—the findings appear to be limited. Casualty aversion finds its place as soon as vital interests are not at stake. The media, as a means, are a key factor in creating and guiding casualty sensitivity. Finally, the public is actually much more robust than previously thought. It is driven by the democratic conversation and takes its cues from political leaders.

However, the hunt for the causes of casualty aversion must not be limited to this level, and needs to continue further. An interesting domain to explore is that of the political and the military elites. They will appear to be the only group that may actually be casualty averse. In fact, casualties are considered to be a symbol of their failure to achieve a goal. Jeffrey Record, in an article in the *Aerospace Power Journal*, relates an interesting poll studying three imaginary crisis scenarios:²²

1. Stabilizing a democratic government in the Congo;

²⁰ Wg. Cdr. DRP Balshaw, *What are the Implications for Britain of America's Apparent Aversion to Casualties?* AC3 S3 (September 1999–July 2000), 7.

²¹ Larson, op. cit., 10–12.

²² Record, op.cit., 5.

2. Preventing Iraq from obtaining weapons of mass destruction;
3. Defending Taiwan against an invasion by China.

In each case, the military elite was the most casualty-averse. Close behind were the political leaders. However, the attitude of the public was exceptionally accepting of casualties. Record suggests a very incisive explanation for those results by posing the questions: "Is it because the assumption of the public's intolerance of casualties excuses presidents and generals from taking the kind of battlefield risks that might invite casualties? Because casualty avoidance offers an alibi for mission frustration and even failure? Because casualty phobia reinforces the argument against using force as a tool of coercive diplomacy?"²³ Hence, the final result of this hunt designates the military and political elites as the group that is potentially the most subject to this phobia. It is not surprising to discover that in democracies this group is also the one that takes the responsibility for any military commitment. Now that the actors have been set out, the analysis continues on to examine the consequences of casualty aversion.

Withdrawal

The main recognized consequence of casualty aversion is that it forces the withdrawal of troops from a situation or commitment. In that way, Somalia for the U.S. is certainly the apotheosis of this phenomenon. However, this direct, visible, and decisive result is not the only one. All current articles depict other hidden consequences for the ability to employ military power.

Changes in the nature of military power

Placing the preservation of human life as the first priority of a mission changes the nature of military power by putting force protection above the achievement of the military objective. Cohen and Shelton state, "The paramount lesson learnt from Allied force is that the well-being of our people must remain our first priority."²⁴ Cory Dauber even argues that the mission in Kosovo was conducted as an air campaign as a result of casualty aversion.²⁵ Public opinion now shapes military activity, and this will have a long-term impact on force structure.

Another aspect is the collapse of compulsion and coercion. By their reluctance to commit their troops, Western nations become unable to compel or coerce. Casualty phobia is perceived as a critical weakness that prevents the U.S. from intervening. However, Mr. Milosevic and Mr. Hussein were certainly too confident in their perception of Western casualty aversion with regard to their own situations. The other major consequence of casualty aversion is the change in the application

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Record, op.cit., 3, quoting William S. Cohen and Gen. Shelton, "Joint statement on Kosovo after-action review," October 14, 1999.

²⁵ Dauber, op.cit., 12.

of military power. More reliance on technology and less on troops may have the following effect: the West, and especially the U.S., may limit their action to fighting the technical part of the war with their asymmetrical superiority. In this case, the human part of the war would be delegated to surrogates. This attitude is often criticized because, while it assumes a large diplomatic consensus with the nations that agree to commit the lives of their own soldiers, it also reduces the flexibility of any intervention.

Diminution of military effectiveness

Casualty aversion not only changes military power but also reduces it. Opponents focus on this new weakness in the Western world. For the U.S., it generates force protection fetishism and even, as Roberto Suro mentions, produces lack of maneuverability and creates the very opposite effect it is supposed to have.²⁶ It is also argued that casualty aversion undermines the strength of a coalition. Lt. Col. R. Caniglia of the U.S. Army demonstrates that the posture of protection of U.S. troops in Kosovo diminished their effectiveness in accomplishing the mission. For him, the U.K. soldiers, with less self-protection, were much more integrated in their surveillance sector and this led to a greater ability to accomplish their mission.²⁷

An indirect effect on forces is what certain authors describe as casualty displacement. "In essence, casualty aversion leads to casualty displacement because those who should take on the casualty burden fundamental to their mission and professional ethos shift that obligation to others who have inherited a more vulnerable situation."²⁸ Casualty displacement also occurs against enemies. Military options directed at saving friendly lives may lead to increased collateral damage. This argument was raised during the Kosovo air campaign, where the choice of high-level air attacks may have degraded the accuracy of certain weapons. Furthermore, it generates a problem of conscience for those very nations who claim to uphold human rights or the right to interfere. As Luttwak argues, dealing with the choices in Kosovo: "The immediate possibility of saving thousands of Albanians from massacre and hundreds of thousands from deportation was obviously not worth the lives of a few pilots."²⁹ Even if this comment seems extreme, it describes accurately where casualty aversion stands when it comes to balancing the lives of peacekeepers against those whom they are supposed to be protecting. Finally, to assess the consequences of casualty aversion, I will quote K. Balshaw: "casualty

²⁶ Roberto Suro, "Zeroing in on Zero Casualty Syndrome," *Washington Post*, August 21, 2000, 2.

²⁷ Lt. Col. Caniglia, *73 US and British Approaches to Force Protection*, available at www.cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/JulAug01/canig.htm.

²⁸ Charles K. Hyde, "Casualty Aversion," *Aerospace Power Journal* (Summer 2000): 1.

²⁹ Edward N. Luttwak, "Give War a Chance," *Foreign Affairs* 78:4 (July/August 1999): 41.

aversion manifests itself in four principal ways: over-caution, over-protectiveness, gradualism, and the use of technically asymmetric technical firepower.”³⁰

After this initial description of casualty aversion and the analysis of its consequences, it is necessary to wonder if, above all, this “illness” of Western societies cannot be useful to them in some way or even be used by certain actors to legitimize their behavior or choices. The best way to approach this argument is to come back to what was depicted as the apotheosis of casualty aversion: the U.S. withdrawal from Mogadishu in 1993. The common perception is that, after suffering eighteen deaths in a single assault, the public pressure relayed by the media pushed President Clinton to withdraw American troops from Somalia, which he did two weeks after the deadly raid. However, other analyses of this event demonstrate that public support was already thin, at under 40 percent, and that this was due to two factors: first, a change in the mission from humanitarian action to fighting the local warlords and; second, cueing of the public following the request by both houses of Congress asking the president to withdraw the troops. Furthermore, “special analysis” by certain newspapers, while not quite misinformation, contradicted the poll results at the time.³¹ In essence, the public response was actually in favor of increasing involvement and even of retaliation. This event shows clearly what democratic conversation authorizes—leaders add text to the images, “they contextualize.”³² Leaders steer and lead. As Record states, “public attitudes toward casualties are malleable, not rigid.”³³ It is in this domain that casualty aversion can be used. It legitimizes decisions to withdraw or to not intervene. A public rightly driven by an efficient democratic conversation will react in a casualty-averse way when the government needs it.

We have now reached a turning point in the analysis. It is time to cease dealing with descriptions, symptoms and consequences, rejections, negations, or even uses of this phenomenon. The following approach concedes that casualty aversion exists and wonders why. Where does it come from?

Part Two: The search for the causes of casualty aversion

The first step in this analysis will be to describe what one can find in current articles to explain the origin of casualty phobia. Although it is necessary to recognize the general reluctance of authors to enter into this domain, it is also clear that each article relates casualty aversion to a specific origin. This can cause some confusion when it comes to focusing on this issue, even if the common belief is that the Vietnam trauma was the unique origin.

In his “British Civil Military Relations,” Dr. Stephen Deakin offers an in-depth description of the nature of the relationship between political and military power.

³⁰ Balshaw, *op.cit.*, 23.

³¹ Kull and Ramsay, *op.cit.*, 208.

³² Dauber, *op.cit.*, 6.

³³ Record, *op.cit.*, 4.

Although it is an analysis of British society, it contains basic features that can be extended to Western democracies in general. More specifically, Deakin presents several key elements essential to an analysis of the true origin of casualty phobia. Deakin's description of a society prone to casualty aversion notes six factors that it is critical to comment upon:

1. Low birth rate (Luttwak approach);
2. Prolonged periods of peace that inhibit the willingness to fight;
3. Disgust at the blood spilled in World War I and the emphasis on military technology since World War II;
4. The western ambivalence about death;
5. The non-vital interest aspect;
6. The great change in moral values in Western societies since the 1950s.

The first three ideas can be immediately commented upon without any investigation into philosophical issues. The last three will be discussed later, with arguments based on philosophy and theology. The demographic aspect may be interpreted as a serious cause of casualty aversion. Hence, all Western societies completed their demographic transition from a high to a low death and birth rate a long time ago. In short, they have fewer children and are not prepared to lose them. Hence, the defenders of this thesis always argue by asking the simple question: How could single-child families accept the death of their only child? This mathematical demonstration is in fact limited and requires further consideration. In fact, it implicitly supposes that because some families have four, five, or six children, they would be more willing to lose one. It would be judicious to ask the same simple question to large families in Western societies, just to determine if they really are more likely to accept the loss of one of their children in a war. The common perception is that in Western society one child is not a substitute for another one who may have died in a war. Generally the birth control offered by medicine as well as religious behavior allows parents to have their desired number of children. There are fewer "unwanted" children, and they no longer represent an economic value or allow a simple substitution of one for another for economic purposes.

The second argument, that prolonged periods of peace inhibit the willingness to go to war, requires some examination. For Western countries, a prolonged period of peace has had several effects. It has allowed the development of trade, comfort, materialism, and the rejection of employing direct violence beyond the defense of Western people and their territory (both of which are considered vital interests). Hence, it appears that a long period of peace in itself is not a cause, but

is a consequence, like growing materialism or trade. It may be that the rejection of violence and its mechanisms (more particularly violence induced through notions of revenge) are the true causes. I will examine this issue more thoroughly below.

The third factor proposed by Deakin is the disgust with bloodshed following World War I and the “revulsion about casualties” that it produced.³⁴ He argues, “certainly by the Second World War, Western societies had adopted slogans such as ‘steel not blood’ and ‘machines not men.’”³⁵ This is still the case today, and Western societies now place a high value on the lives of their military personnel. They have adopted high technology solutions to war, partly to keep their own casualties to a minimum. This thesis is also depicted well in General De Gaulle’s vision of war as described in his 1938 book *La France et Son Armée* (France and Her Army).³⁶ Although, in some ways, De Gaulle admired Napoleon for his maneuvers, he also critiqued his bloody method of waging war that transformed Europe into a charnel house. Philonenko states what would become “the superior philosophy of war” for De Gaulle: “Nothing is better than the combination of proportion and science.”³⁷ Therefore, casualty aversion can find a home in such a doctrine. Western nations are science-centric and can use science to reduce risks to people. Furthermore, proportionality opens the door to gradation in conflicts and to flexibility in the application of military power to its appropriate level. Hence, casualty aversion can occur as soon as the military tools exist and the doctrine includes a notion of proportionality. Technical superiority of this kind is not a cause of casualty phobia but does place a requirement on those who are in a position to reduce or even avoid casualties to do so.

After this glance at the generally admitted origins of casualty aversion, it is once again necessary to go deeper. We have to read the works of philosophers and thinkers to discover other routes to the causes of casualty aversion in Western societies. Those elements will lead us to the roots that link the people to their attitudes on violence and death. However, before looking at casualty aversion itself, let us start with its antithesis: casualty propensity.

The antithesis: casualty propensity

Many philosophers consider violence, war, or death as a core characteristic of human nature. The following ideas presented by Philonenko help us to begin our analysis of this phenomenon. Tolstoy considered that “the true root of history is not reason but madness and murder.”³⁸ He claimed that people kill each other

³⁴ Dr. Stephen Deakin, “British Civil Military Relations: An Introduction,” in *Political Institution in Britain*, ed. Lyton Robins (London: Longman, 1987), 10.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ A. Philonenko, *Essais sur la Philosophie de la Guerre* (Essay on the Philosophy of War) (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1988), 92.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Philonenko, op.cit., 182, quoting Leo Tolstoy, *Que devons nous faire?* Vol. XXIX, Œuvres complètes (Paris: J. W. Bienstock), 296.

because it is biological, inevitable, and that humans cannot be at peace with the world: “Man is stuck in the instant like an animal.”³⁹

Hegel made the distinction between “mere courage” and “military courage.” The modern world also gives an additional dimension to courage. Hence, courage is no longer individual but collective. A person acts as a member of a community, and his courage is extra-personal. Furthermore, Hegel claimed that “the military state is the state of universality: its own defense is incumbent upon it,” and it has the duty to go on until sacrificed.⁴⁰ This is more than the mere courage that consists of defending one’s own honor: “The genuine courage of civilized people consists in being ready to sacrifice for the state, in order that a single person is nothing more than one among the multitude.”⁴¹ Finally, Hegel, like Rousseau, admired war and heroism. They were both very skeptical about notions of perpetual peace. The praise of war that also existed in both authors states that the individual can have an authentic existence only among a living community for which he sacrifices himself.⁴²

After having seen with Tolstoy that madness and murder are part of human nature, and with Hegel that sacrifice is at the root of the courage of civilized people, it is necessary to wonder why escaping from war and death is so difficult. Creveld provides some potential answers. For him, “war stood up as the eternal, unchanging axis around which revolves the whole human existence.”⁴³ War has no substitute because all substitutes are civilized. Though war is also in one sense an artificial activity, it differs from all the rest in that it offers complete freedom, including, paradoxically, the freedom to die.⁴⁴ “The true essence of war consists not just of one group killing another but of its members’ readiness to be killed in return if necessary. Consequently, the only way to bring about perpetual peace would be to somehow eradicate man’s willingness, even eagerness, to take risks of every kind up to and including death.”⁴⁵ Later, Creveld argues that this eagerness belongs to the individual himself. As psychotherapists state, trying to eliminate this eagerness will also suppress “other qualities considered as essential to humanity such as playfulness, curiosity, inventiveness, creativity, even the sheer joy of living. What all these activities have in common is that they involve coping with the unknown.”⁴⁶ This last argument brings the analysis back to its point of departure, that is to say the individual himself and his relationship with death. The individual or the society seems connected to sacrifice, and both are far from

³⁹ Ibid., 212.

⁴⁰ Philonenko, op.cit., 56, quoting Hegel, *Philosophie du droit*, 327.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 59.

⁴³ Creveld, op.cit., 218.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

exhibiting signs of casualty aversion. Is it possible to find a basis for casualty aversion in any philosophical theory?

Among philosophers, Kant and his perpetual peace offers an open door for casualty aversion can find a place. Although Kant states that war is grafted onto human nature, he goes on to say that this nature also tends toward the idea of justice. His project of perpetual peace attempts to reconcile those two opposed prerequisites.⁴⁷ Hence, societies tend to impose a sense of justice that counter-balances the propensity for war. The power of justice, especially if it is from a primary authority, will provide an explanation for casualty aversion. The role of justice is critical in understanding the attitude toward violence and death in Western societies.

Casualty aversion and the West's relationship with violence

The role of judiciary power in Western society needs to be examined if we are to appreciate all of its implications for casualty phobia. The basis for this reasoning is the same as Chamagne's, who approached casualty aversion using *La Violence et le Sacré* (The Violence and the Sacred) by René Girard.⁴⁸ Western society is characterized by the advent of judicial power. In other forms of civilization, and especially in ancient ones, the role of sacrifice was at the center of the regulation of violence. Sacrifice is a violence substitution that has disappeared in the Western world. Nevertheless, violence must be regulated by other tools wielded by society in order to preserve its structure. The problem is not to repel or to negate violence, but to possess a paramount authority or "legitimate monopoly" that can apply a certain form of violence. Judicial power regulates violence by diverting the threat of revenge, or what Girard calls the induced or reciprocal revenge for a wrong suffered: "It is the judiciary system that wards off the threat of revenge."⁴⁹ Justice does not replace revenge, but rather places it under a supreme power. Furthermore, the use of judicial power avoids the escalation of violence through its denial of reciprocal revenge.

In *Réflexion sur la Violence* (Thoughts on Violence), written in 1908, Sorel outlines the same vision of Western society. Rules and laws are precautions against violence. Sorel adds the dimension of education to this management of violence. For him, the Western way of educating children increasingly marginalizes the use of violence. Not only is violence not taught, Western society does not educate children to consider self-sacrifice for a fundamental cause. In addition to this, the practice of corporal punishment has all but disappeared.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁸ R. Chamagne, "Le Concept Zéro Mort: l'Arbre qui Cache la Forêt" (The Zero Dead Concept: the Tree that Hides the Forest), *Le Piège* (September 2000).

⁴⁹ R. Girard, *La violence et le Sacré* (Violence and the Sacred). (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, Hachette Littératures, 1972), 29.

Hence, violence no longer touches people's lives. Western people are educated and possess a judiciary to escape from an individual relationship with violence and the temptation towards reciprocal revenge. Casualty aversion finds a place in this process. As soon as vital interests—that is to say, citizens or home territory—are not at stake, the Western mentality dictates that society seeks to avoid sacrifices. It attempts to apply rules that minimize violence. This mind-set applies to Western people, but also to any potential enemy, as it can reduce losses on both sides. Here the problem of collateral damage appears. Although confusion often exists between casualty aversion and collateral damage, the theory as developed so far suggests that both of these phenomena come from the rejection of the notion of sacrifice in the Western world. More specifically, for peace support operations, this willingness to reduce violence and to minimize casualties diminishes the desire for reciprocal revenge and initiates the first step toward the power of the judiciary being the final and paramount authority. The advent of effective justice therefore explains a possible cause of casualty aversion, not as a negative factor but as a mere product of Western society and its manner of regulating violence. Justice is not the only characteristic that may help to explain casualty phobia, however, and it is now necessary to approach the core problem of the West's relationship with death.

Casualty aversion and the West's relationship with death

In his *Essai sur l'Expérience de la Mort et le Problème Moral du Suicide* (Essay on the Experience of Death and the Moral Problem of Suicide), Paul Louis Landsberg presents an analysis of the experience of death. This experience is described as a transition from pre-mortem suffering to the post-mortem absence:

The dominant factor is this one: a living corpse suffers, our corpse receives carnal sympathy with this tortured comrade. And then, an instant when all goes quiet, when all seems finished, when the stiffened features of this loved face surrender. It is precisely in this moment when the living being abandons us that we will have the experience of the mysterious absence of the spiritual person. For an instant, we are relieved. The pain of the carnal sympathy is finished: but immediately, we feel ourselves transported to the strange and cold world of the accomplished death. . . . If the death was the absent presence, the dead is now the present absence.⁵⁰

This experience does not obligatorily happen simultaneously with death itself, but may happen later.

After this description of the experience of death, Landsberg suggests a pause in this debate. He describes the suffering of the parents of a soldier who died in war. Their experience of death is truncated. When the fatal news arrives, these par-

⁵⁰ P. L. Landsberg, *Essais sur l'Expérience de la Mort et le Problème Moral du Suicide* (Essay on the experience of death and the moral problem of suicide). (Paris: Seuil, 1951), 33ff.

ents are faced directly with the fact of the spiritual death of their child. They make incredible efforts to understand the circumstances. “In the face of accomplished death, we are like expatriates in our own world” and, according to Landsberg, only religion can help us to cope with this feeling.⁵¹ Mainly, Landsberg concentrates on the role played by funeral rites, as these allow a connection with the dead through conducting a final deed for them. This description provides a deep analysis of post-war trauma. More particularly, it explains the Vietnam trauma: families received very little consolation in response to their search for explanations. More particularly, parents were unable to link the death of their child to a just and noble cause. In these cases, parents will not tolerate ambiguity.

Now that the experience of death has been looked at, the philosophical approach leads us to a description of its two main traditions: Stoicism and Epicureanism. For the stoic, death, like birth, belongs to the order of the cosmos. Death is not an absolute end; man belongs to the cosmos, where nothing perishes. A perpetual mediation exists to enable the individual to have sovereignty over death. “Stoicism is by essence a doctrine of liberty, and this liberty is based on the possibility of the free death.”⁵² “One must acquire death to be able to be free from it,” and according to Seneca one must even change death into activity.⁵³

While the stoic faces death, the epicurean ignores it. Epicurean doctrine is often called the sophism of the non-existence of death. “Death is nothing compared to us. If we exist, death does not already exist; if death exists, we don’t exist any more.”⁵⁴ “Now, it remains the problem to die in the more pleasant way, which, according to tradition, Epicure realized himself by drinking wine in his hot bath.”⁵⁵

After having looked at these two traditions regarding the experience of death, it is now necessary to jump from the individual to society. Sorel adds another dimension to this explanation of the relationship with death in liberal society. He conducts a detailed analysis of liberal society and its evolution, especially with respect to the development of socialist ideas. Like Girard, he recognizes that ancient societies relied on sacrifices of their members to survive and maintain cohesion. But for liberal societies, this relationship with sacrifice is incompatible:

The liberal society, in front of their enemies, can survive only because of sacrifice, at a certain moment, of a part of their members. This fact is incomprehensible for liberal thought itself and can be conceived only by external feelings to this system, like the devotion, the sacrifice and even the

⁵¹ Ibid., 41.

⁵² Ibid., 72.

⁵³ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 69.

heroism. . . That is to say that liberal society cannot be only liberal. . . The truth is that liberalism is “parasitizing” the societies that precedes it.⁵⁶

Hence, at the level of society, there exists a tension between liberalism, which places the interest of the individual first, and the possibilities of the survival of that very society. Later, Sorel describes the evolution of this society in what he calls the degeneration of capitalism. For him, the incompatibility of liberalism and sacrifice leads to an ideology of materialism, comfort, and fear. The very bourgeois class, whose bold chiefs created capitalism, becomes fearful and humanitarian. This class gives way to an aristocracy, willing to live in peace, loving order and quiet. His analysis demonstrates that liberal society is not only averse to sacrifice, but it is also led towards materialism. That materialism is not only economic but also structural, inherent in every aspect of society.

At this point, the experience of death at the individual level outlined by Landsberg has to be linked with Sorel’s thoughts at the level of society. Liberal society not only negates sacrifices but also by its very materialism favors an epicurean attitude. Individuals do not want to face death, and they become less and less stoic. Liberalism creates the conditions for Epicureanism. Through this process, the problem of death moves away from the center of experience. Carnal suffering and the absence of the spiritual are rejected. The human relation to death becomes artificial and is transformed by false perceptions. This approach helps us to understand the behavior of Western societies in several areas. Many examples outside the military domain illustrate this characteristic of Western nations: the desire to live as long as possible, to repel death as far as possible, or the desire to remain young and the rejection of pain. Therefore, casualty aversion also finds its roots in the same dilemma of liberal society. This experience of death tends to be epicurean; that is to say, by ignoring death, the individual is placed at the center of the society. The tolerance for suffering, like the willingness to sacrifice, simply does not exist any more. Casualty aversion is the symptom of liberalism and Epicureanism applied to the military domain.

Religion

Until now, the analysis has remained careful to avoid a key element when it comes to dealing with society, violence, and death. Religion can be ignored no longer in this debate, and certainly contains a vast domain of thoughts on humanity and its relationship with death.

As noted by Proudhon, theology cannot be dissociated from war. For him, war and peace are divine facts, and he goes even further:

⁵⁶ Juliard, in preface to A. Sorel, *Réflexions sur la Violence* (Thoughts on Violence) (Paris: Seuil, 1990), xi.

Peace is a divine fact because it remained for us a myth. We have never seen its shadow, we don't know either its substance or its laws ... like war it has its place in our thoughts. ... War is the most ancient of all religions: it will remain the last. Make it clear: a new religion will arise: the human one.⁵⁷

In that sense, Philonenko states that the work of Proudhon is far more than a simple analysis of war or peace in itself: "the ambition of his work was in reality a fundamental theory of human reason."⁵⁸

The following approach to religion will remain very simple. The reading of the Bhagavad Gita and its theories by Jean Herbert, the analysis of the experience of death in Christian religion by Landsberg, or the approach contained within the Koran and Islam's relation to death lead us to escape from the singularity of each religion. Hence we will concentrate on religion itself. This approach not only avoids dilemmas and sterile comparisons between religions, but also focuses the problem on the search for possible religious causes of casualty aversion. The analysis leads to an amazing conclusion: as was the case in the previously examined domains, casualty phobia does not have any roots in religion. Religions are ambivalent when it comes to this phenomenon. First, many thinkers recognize that religions always aim to reduce violence. "Religion is far from being useless. It dehumanizes violence, it removes man from his own violence to protect him, by being a transcendent and always present threat that requires to be quieted by appropriate rites and by a modest and prudent behavior."⁵⁹ Philonenko mentions the embarrassment of Machiavelli when he tackled the problem of the constitution of an army: "He did not ignore that the Christian religion, the only one able to confer a faith to the army, housed a pacific tradition. ... His religion, our religion, was opposed to the warrior ethos."⁶⁰ In this comment, we can see that religions intervene at the same level as judiciary power and education, as previously mentioned. In fact, religions manage violence and suffering. Hence, religious people should always be peaceful and display casualty aversion through this desire to limit pain. It was not surprising to find many religious actors in the demonstrations or riots that occurred during the Vietnam War, or more generally against any armed conflict.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity of religion must be addressed. Not only does religion seek to diminish pain and suffering but it also helps the believer to come to terms with death. "The superior forms of faith that survive exactly agree with this experience (of death). They present to us the spiritual person ... but only as disappeared, as living in the absence. ... The faith in survival promises to us that our own death will gather us with the neighbor now disappeared, that we will

⁵⁷ Philonenko, op.cit., 120.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Girard, op.cit., 201–202.

⁶⁰ Philonenko, op.cit., 25.

again hear his voice . . . free of this old body.”⁶¹ Landsberg mentions later, discussing the Christian experience of death, that “damnation is therefore the only true death, the only eternal death.”⁶² The ambiguity of the religious factor is that it also offers the ultimate, just, and supreme cause for which to die. Pushing this theory to its extreme negates casualty aversion by legitimizing human sacrifice. Sherif Mohammed, in his chapter on *Jihad* writes:

This attitude of continuous death awareness and preferring an honorable death to any other kind of death was the root cause of all glories of early Islam. Those fearless companions of the Prophet (SAW) spread Islam to the shores of the Atlantic and to the borders of China in less than one century. They led to the most impressive military campaigns in history and their incentive was very simple: the search for martyrdom, the most honorable death for a Muslim.⁶³

Hence, religions, by their expansionist character—Christianization during the Crusades, or the *Jihad* for Islam for example—do not necessarily aim to reduce violence. They may offer an “excuse” to kill and to be killed by giving the ultimate hope of being saved and going to heaven. In that way, they are far from averse to casualties.

These two assessments demonstrate the ambivalence of religions regarding casualty aversion. Therefore, it is impossible to draw any kind of simple relation between Western societies, casualty aversion, and Christianity, for example. Furthermore, the final aspect of the discussion of religion here is to admit that its importance has been in constant decline through the twentieth century. Those very societies that tend to be casualty averse—liberal democracies—practice their Sunday prayers less and less. Is it possible to draw a relation between those two factors? Although this would require a complete study in itself, the ambivalence of religions seems too strong to allow a real assessment as to whether less religious people are more casualty-averse.

We have found possible roots of casualty aversion in the advent of the judiciary in society and in the relationship that liberal society has to death. The ambivalence of religion does not allow us to find any obvious root of casualty aversion in the religions themselves. The final section will now describe others factors that favor this phenomenon; they are enablers rather than original causes.

⁶¹ Landsberg, *op.cit.*, 34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶³ Mohammed Sherif, *Preparing for Death*, available online at www.unn.ac.uk/societies/islamic/misc/death1.htm.

Part Three: Key factors enabling casualty aversion

Democracies as “pacifist” societies

The reluctance of democracies to go to war may be interpreted as a factor that encourages casualty aversion. Although Tocqueville recognized that democracies are subject to war like aristocratic societies, he demonstrates their reluctance to go to war. As people become increasingly equal, their willingness to wage war diminishes. Tocqueville writes that, “there are two things that democratic people will always have difficulties in doing: starting and finishing wars.”⁶⁴ For him, industry and trade are true replacements for war. War is a calamity both for the loser and the winner. Finally, Tocqueville states that the materialism of democratic people is an obstacle to war: “War disturbs and reduces to despair this multitude of citizens whose small passions require peace to be satisfied.”⁶⁵ Hence, casualty aversion may be interpreted as a symptom of the tendency of democracies to hang onto peace. To continue with Tocqueville, it is amazing to see that his position regarding commitment to the point of death is totally casualty-favorable. In fact, he also describes this symptom, and his conclusions are in opposition to the current situation in Western democracies. Tocqueville writes:

Men of democracies naturally have the passionate desire to possess goods quickly and to enjoy them easily. Most of them love the hazard and fear death less than the troubles. It is in this spirit that they conduct industry and trade, and it is the same spirit on the battlefield that leads them to expose their lives voluntarily to obtain in one moment the price of victory. There is no grandeur that is more convenient for a democratic people than military grandeur, the shining grandeur that is obtained without work, only by risking one’s life.⁶⁶

With the eyes of the twenty-first century, it is surprising to see the ability of this French traveler of the nineteenth century to describe current problems. Nevertheless, his error in this case certainly comes from his historical context. Hence, although his analysis fits into a world of nation-states, military grandeur is no longer the paramount value. Economic, or even now cultural grandeur, has superseded the military factor. It is, perhaps, a reason for explaining the advent of casualty aversion as military grandeur ceases to be the supreme value.

In the same spirit, Proudhon has an identical approach: military heroism will be replaced by industrial heroism. But Proudhon considers that death is a constant factor throughout history.⁶⁷ Hence, even in industrial conflicts, death will remain

⁶⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, 2 (Democracy in America, vol. 2) (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1991), 329.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁶⁷ Philonenko, *op.cit.*, 176–180.

present and central. Proudhon addresses this issue in the conclusion of his fourth book: “In these new battles, we will not have to show less resolution, less devotion, or despise less death and delight. We will not count fewer casualties or bruised persons.”⁶⁸ Hence, Proudhon has already described the acceptance of casualty aversion at the very level at which it is encompassed today.

These two thinkers who have addressed the problem of casualty phobia in the past centuries both underline the inherent reluctance of the democratic system to wage war. This assumption often brings a misperception that democracies are not successful at conducting war. This deduction is incorrect, as Tocqueville demonstrates in his chapter “[That which] renders democratic armies weaker than others when starting a campaign and stronger in a prolonged war.”⁶⁹ To apply this reasoning to the end of the twentieth century, it seems that the reluctance of democracies to wage war favors casualty aversion in peacetime. It perpetuates the image that democracies are pacifist. This may explain the misperceptions of Mr. Milosevic or Mr. Hussein, who chose to focus on this symptom while failing to understand the actual resolution of the Western democracies.

The uses of military power that enable casualty aversion

The role given by politicians to military forces deeply influences the likelihood of finding casualty aversion among the people. It seems obvious that casualty phobia will be found more easily among interventionist countries with global responsibilities rather than among more neutral actors. Dealing with the use of military power, it is then necessary to set up key principles that are likely to predict the presence of casualty aversion in a society.

The first point is to come back to a very simple assumption: a soldier has to be on the battlefield, risking his life, to create a possible debate about casualties. This aspect has already been mentioned with regard to the technical propensity of Western nations. Hence, if UAVs,⁷⁰ satellites, and missiles can wage war, the human problem is suppressed instantaneously.

The second point is that the physical conflict must actually be possible. The Cold War and its core principle of mutual nuclear deterrence froze the possibility of conflict. As Aron stated, “The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by nuclear bombs points to the pinnacle of . . . the barbarian application of the principle of annihilation interpreted in its material sense.”⁷¹ Then, he states that nuclear war creates a discontinuity between policy and the military: “war is no more the continuation of politics by other means.”⁷² By creating the possibility of absolute

⁶⁸ Philonenko, op.cit., 154, quoting Proudhon, *The War and the Peace*, édition des œuvres complètes, 483.

⁶⁹ Tocqueville, op.cit., 337.

⁷⁰ Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

⁷¹ R. Aron, *Penser la Guerre, Clausewitz II, l'âge planétaire* (Thoughts on War, Clausewitz II, the planetary age) (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976), 139.

⁷² Ibid.

war, nuclear weapons froze the ability of the nation to wage and to analyze conventional wars. “With the absence of reference to the absolute war, what criteria can be used in the negotiation between enemies which, traditionally, reflects the relation of forces or the results of previous or future fights?”⁷³ As soon as the ice of the Cold War melted, when nuclear deterrence was no longer the primary factor in the balance, nations came back to the ancient criteria of waging war. Hence, war with true soldiers on true battlefields again becomes possible. If the role of soldiers becomes central again, then casualty aversion—the ability or the reluctance to commit lives or suffer deaths for a cause—returns to the center of the debate. Nuclear deterrence and the possibility of absolute war not only inhibited the casualty problem but also froze the ability to deal with the commitment of lives.

The third point to highlight is active diplomacy. When diplomacy incorporates violence among its tools, it seems obvious that the problem of risk to the “diplomat-soldier” on the ground is a paramount factor of any intervention. Hence, offensive diplomacy, like compulsion and coercion, often put people on the front line of the conflict. It is at this point that political leaders have to make a choice. The critical point in the escalation from compulsion to coercion is not the increase of the cost of intervention but the very moment where human lives are at stake. The price that is willing to be paid in terms of human life is nowadays interpreted as a strong political signal.

Hence, a state of Tepid War, where possibilities of conflict are not frozen, places human life at the center of the issue. Political and diplomatic choices, like strategic options, frame the scope of casualty aversion because man always has a central role to play.

Conclusion

The above analysis contained three main steps. First, the debate was set out with a review of the symptoms and the manifestations of casualty phobia. Second, the debate plunged into philosophical thought, seeking the discovery of the roots of this phenomenon. Finally, the presentation of key enablers described decisive factors that are critical in assessing this issue. Let us remember the main idea of the analysis: casualty aversion cannot simply be understood through a mere description of its symptoms. Its true origins lie in the relationship between society and violence and death.

By limiting the enquiry to an analysis of government, the media, and the public, the result is simple. Casualty aversion exists when vital interests are not at stake, and the media are the decisive tool in spreading it. Finally, the military and political elites seem to be the only groups that are truly casualty-averse, the very groups that assume the ultimate decision to commit the lives of soldiers. The

⁷³ Ibid., 232.

greatest cause of concern for Western societies would be if the casualty problem were not allowed to be a problem at all. They would cease to be democracies and return to being sacrificial societies where the lives of citizens were at the disposition of their lords. Perhaps even worse would be the total negation of this concept, like the epicurean negation of death. Casualty aversion has always existed, both within the military and civilian society, from the level of the individual to the entire population, from the soldier vomiting in fear in the trenches to the chief of staff.

The consequences of casualty phobia appear at two main levels. At the political level, leaders must take into account the management of the media and the public. These have to be driven by strong leadership that leaves no room for ambiguity. Hence the democratic conversation undertaken in co-operation with the media allows governments to fashion the public's attitude toward casualties in accordance with their goals. At the military level, casualty phobia needs to be managed properly. The hierarchy cannot deny this factor. It changes the application of military power and in some ways can reduce its efficiency. Nevertheless, the initial description of casualty aversion, looking at its symptoms alone, paints an incomplete picture. It is surprising to note that too often the debate only revolves around its manifestations and consequences, restricting the issue to a desperate rejection of this phenomenon. In this case, casualty aversion is perceived as a weakness that should be eliminated.

The beginning of the quest for the true origins of casualty aversion demonstrates how careful the reasoning has to be when it comes to looking for its causes. Although a low birth rate, prolonged periods of peace, and an aversion to bloodshed that leads to certain technical choices seem to be pretty explanations, they need to be approached with caution. The analysis quickly takes on another dimension when philosophical and religious thoughts are introduced. The relationship that man has with violence and death brings fundamental elements to the discussion. It explains how violence is grafted onto the individual and how the survival of the society can depend on the sacrifice of some of its members. However, the relationship between the individual and society is not only sacrificial, and the advent of judiciary power as well as education opens doors to a greater understanding of casualty aversion. Hence, the liberal society, through its method of managing violence, tends to favor an epicurean attitude toward death. The manifestation of this idea in the military domain is casualty aversion.

The analysis here based upon philosophy and theology can be criticized as partial and selective. Plato, Clausewitz, Sun Tzu (so often quoted in Anglophone articles), Liddell Hart—none of these thinkers were used to spread light on this issue. Why have I discussed only Epicureanism and Stoicism when there exist so many other philosophies that look at our relationship with death? Let us remember that the initial aim was to find the roots of casualty aversion, or at least some of them. It is crucial to emphasize that the routes we can take to reveal the sources are

not so important as long as we accept that each has limitations. Nevertheless, the implicit aim was also to show that casualty aversion is far more than a debate over symptoms that can be summed up by the examples of Vietnam and Mogadishu. Casualty aversion is fundamentally a question regarding how to deal with the reality of death in war, whatever war it may be: Cold War, Hot War, or Tepid War as it has existed since the 1990s. There is no evading this issue. The concept of zero-dead is only a fashionable term, used since the end of the twentieth century, to comment on and analyze the eternal problem of man's commitment to violence and death. Casualty aversion is a way of describing the issue of death in war, but it now needs to be extracted from its narrow context. The analysis also allows us to approach the state of Tepid War; not a Cold War, where the possibility of conflict is frozen or very limited, or a Hot War, where vital interests are at stake, rendering a casualty count irrelevant. Tepid War is where the twenty-first century began: a constant posture where the role of man is central and where death occurs in an ocean of diplomacy.

Whether a believer or not, religions help us to encompass the relationship of man with death as a core problem, because there is no way to avoid it. The following quotation, although it must not be interpreted at its most basic level, especially after September 11 2001, brings us back to this simple reality: "Whosoever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you be in strongly built towers."⁷⁴

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⁷⁴ *The Koran*, al Nisa, 4:78.

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To take advantage of the diversity of nations represented at the U.K. Joint Services Command and Staff College, the following interviews have been conducted to appreciate how casualty aversion is perceived around the world. All interviewed people were military students on the ACSC 5. As such, their perceptions of casualty aversion may not be an exact representation of their entire culture. Nevertheless, they constitute an incredibly broad-minded source, well aware of this issue and with a fantastic background in their own military culture. Finally, these interviews were conducted after all the readings and the core analysis of this essay had been completed. Hence, the analysis was not oriented toward finding out what may have been suggested by military personnel. These interviews were the *bouquet final* to appreciate this topic as a whole and to test the analysis previously done. In any case, these interviews were one of the best moments of my course and I would like to thank my comrades for this contribution. All interviews respected the following format:

After presenting the definition of casualty aversion as set out in this essay, I asked the following questions:

1. What is your definition of casualty aversion?
2. Do you find your society evolving in terms of materialism, practice of religion, and relationship with death?
3. Do you consider your country or your society to be casualty averse?
4. In a recent crisis your country has been involved in, have you experienced casualty aversion?
5. Do you consider that casualty aversion is a mainly a Western or even a U.S. problem?

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