Chapter 8

The Only One He Ever Feared:
The Nature of War

From the beginning of Harry’s journey, we have indications that the tension between good and evil must end in war. So, too, it has been with many conflicts in the Muggle world. War is the longest- and most-studied subject in politics, dating straight back to Thucydides’s History of the Peloponnesian War. Such attention is natural, since war is the single most costly action a state can undertake, often gambling its very survival.

Similarly, military service has commonly been a crucial requirement for full membership in a nation, at least for men. Harry’s and Ron’s desire to fight can be seen not only as an indication of their passion for justice, but also as a sign that they have arrived as fully qualified wizards, NEWTs or not. In this chapter we will consider the ways war in Harry’s world approximates, and diverges from, war in our own.

For Rowling, politics is a direct consequence of the tension between good and evil in the world, according to Iver Neumann, and, therefore, inherently conflictual. As a result, the central questions of politics revolve around “a) how to separate good from evil. The institution /being who carries out this task will be the linchpin in politics, b) how to rally allies to the side of good, and how to keep them, c) when and how to strike out against evil” (Neumann in Nexon and Neumann 162). In this chapter, we will also consider Rowling’s answers to these questions, since they are the ones that most concern scholars of war.

Before delving into more generaliseable questions, it is impossible to miss Rowling’s many referents to one particular conflict: WWII. Earlier, we explored the ways that pureblood wizarding ideology
mirrors the racial ideology of the Third Reich. Rowling’s treatment of war extends the metaphor in paying homage to the WWII. Elegant plays on words such as “Durmstrang” and “Grindelwald” are both Germanic in origin, and reference specific components of German national mythology.¹ Harry and Hermione assault the shrieking shack on the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1994 (Schafer 2000: 178). Fudge’s appeasement and denial borrow more than a little from Neville Chamberlain—surely Fudge’s refusal to face the truth does as much damage to the wizarding world’s preparation as the Munich Agreement did for Britain’s. Voldemort plans to first take over Europe. And John Granger paints a convincing portrait of the Weasley/Delacoeur wedding as a nod to the Anglo/Gallic alliance (Granger 2008: 255).

**Origins of War: Is It the System, or Is It Us?**

International relations scholars disagree whether war is an inescapable product of the international system’s structure, or, instead, results from the actions and interactions of states and individuals.

**Anarchy.** Realists, as we’ve discussed, focus on the way the anarchic nature of the system makes self-help, paranoia, and, therefore, conflict, practically inevitable. One of the most famous twentieth-century realists was Kenneth Waltz. In *Man, the State, and War* (1958), Waltz argued that international anarchy explains not only the occurrence of war, but the limits of cooperation between states. In part because peace is a public good, in part because of the overarching need to gird oneself against one’s enemies, states have incentives to cheat on peace agreements and on arms limitations. Absent an international enforcer, cooperation can never be guaranteed, and conflict is always a possibility (Waltz 1959). Realists believe these insecurities are the basis of most international conflict. Harry and his compatriots are often left to fend for themselves in a world that is rapidly changing, unpredictable, and in which the adults on whom they have relied seem increasingly unable to protect them. The Ministry seems of limited efficacy even when Harry first encounters it, and of course as Voldemort’s power grows, the Ministry’s becomes increasingly hollow.

Specific aspects of the international system can make it even more conflictual. One of the most important, at least for realists, is the balance of power—are there major powers or power blocs arrayed against each other? Thucydides believed that when there was relative equality of power (however measured) among major players, war was less likely. This was because no state could confidently predict its likelihood of