This illuminating book contends with the thrust of contemporary theorizing about wars and the national motivations for embarking on and pursuing them. Put somewhat simply, but not simplistically, the bulk of theories based in political science (and its offshoots such as international relations, defence analysis or security studies) purport that armed conflict is embarked upon to further the (rational) pursuit of either political power and/or wealth. Accordingly, actors (almost always States or States-in-the-making) rationally weigh the costs and benefits of armed struggles in terms of their value for promoting security or prosperity. At bottom, these approaches are very much centred on issues of deterrence between States and the dynamics of creating and maintaining that deterrence.

In this volume, Thomas Lindemann focuses on some central features of armed struggles that are usually overlooked or, at best, played down by national decision-makers and their aides because they do not fit their assumptions and (realist) world views. Concretely, Lindemann contends that sometimes armed struggles for recognition may be more important than terrestrial conquest or, indeed, than the prospect of losing wars. Countries may launch into war if winning acknowledgment and respect on the national and international stages are important for national constituencies and their leaders. In other words, Lindemann’s analysis provides answers to puzzling cases where actors may initiate wars (or other armed struggles) knowing that they may lose them. His explanations then, centre on the psychological and emotional impulse at the base of (collective) self-esteem which may be pursued through martial means at the expense of security and material interests.

To take off from the author’s formulation, not enough explanatory power has been granted to *homo symbolicus* in the pursuit of war, to human beings actively pursuing the symbolic side of life. In his rendering, individuals, collective actors and nations all have a need to preserve a positive self-image for both emotional and instrumental reasons. This psychological understanding of meaning – assuming a universal need – involves creating and cultivating a good reputation. The importance (and sophistication) of Lindemann’s analysis, however, goes beyond the simple transposition of individual psychological needs to social and political actors. In his persuasive analysis, such needs (that are based in individuals) radiate out to the collective and then national levels in ways that bring to the fore of analysis the crucial importance of armed struggles that must be justified (legitimacy) and often embarked upon for recognition. Analytically then, the author systematically and skilfully builds up from the psychological to the social level of collective action, then to the level of national decision-making and finally to that of international relations. In regard to each level, he has very credibly mastered the relevant

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scholarly literature and condensed its insights for an understanding of war. Such a ‘bottom-up’ approach lends Lindemann’s analysis great sophistication for it focuses on processes of collective efforts to promote self-image, gain legitimacy, create and maintain prestige and fight for (national) honour. What is no less significant is that the picture we get is less of calculated moves and cold decision-makers but of emotionally charged individuals and collectivities. Emotions and the meanings evoking them have come to international relations.

The author, however, is not content with general contentions: he demonstrates how recognition and non-recognition are identifiable empirically in international relations. This argument is especially important within the academic environments dominated by a (primarily US-based) political science that denigrates or at times even ignores any phenomena that are not quantifiable and clearly exemplified empirically. Lindemann thus carefully sets out a number of hypotheses that can be tested, by himself and by others. It is in this respect that the empirical cases he systematically analyzes are so significant. The volume is thus divided into two main parts (each respectively divided into two chapters). The first part lays out the theoretical framework that Lindemann develops to understand the ‘symbolic’ approaches to war. The second part includes the concrete cases: he begins by focusing on wars of pacification between great powers motivated by a need for (international) respect and then goes on to explore wars undertaken to avoid shame; following these cases, he investigates instances in which the politics of recognition in international relations (the dynamics of losing or saving ‘face’) are central.

I should add that Lindemann’s work also carries applied insights for decision-makers (although the volume is not written as a practical primer). For example, when viewed through the symbolic lenses that he constructs, we can see that the various Israeli-Arab clashes (the Palestinian-Israeli struggle being only one) can be more fully understood as a conflict over meaning, and not only as a ‘simple’ competition over political and economic resources. Indeed, as he makes clear, historically the Soviet Union sought not only political hegemony but also recognition as a great power (and the prestige and reputation associated with that status) from the United States, just as China now clearly seeks global recognition (think of the staging of the Olympic Games in Beijing). More broadly yet, as Lindemann explains through the case studies, symbolic recognition is at the base of many peace agreements. From an applied point of view, he convincingly shows how various forms of inclusion and positive valuation must be significant parts of any management of conflict and armed struggle. Thus he ends the book by suggesting that perhaps there is a way to rethink the carrot-and-stick approach to the pacification of problematic powers such as China, Russia, North Korea or Iran. The way forward is to recognize their need for recognition and aspirations, and thus to integrate them into world institutions. These actions would open a way to get them into the game rather than labelling and reproducing them as contentious outsiders or troublemakers.

For scholars interested in conflicts and wars, Lindemann’s slim volume opens up a host of questions centred broadly on meanings and what may be termed ‘the symbolic’ as a complementary approach to realism’s emphasis on power and wealth. Thus, for example,
power and wealth themselves are coloured by meanings: wealth is often seen not as an end in and of itself, but rather as a way to cultivate and signal a certain reputation and prestige. In addition, we may ask about the ways in which armed struggles are themselves defined or understood in a certain country. Japan after World War II is one instance where pursuing national interests by armed means was seen as unacceptable. Thus I can certainly foresee scholars building on this illuminating volume to carry forward the analysis of meanings in international relations as they bear upon the waging of war.

A penultimate point is related to the rather amateurish production of the volume. I do not refer here to the translation that is usually very good (except for the reversion to ‘Americanese’ that has come to dominate many English language analyses in the social sciences: one example is the term “recognition needs”). Rather, I refer to the very poor copy-editing that mars an otherwise superb little book – to the many typographical errors, or the deletion of the endnote section for the introduction. Finally, there is no conclusion – a pity, since the book reads more like an extended exercise than a full-fledged volume.

Yet this hardly detracts from the fact that the volume by Lindemann (a political scientist of German origin, pursuing a successful career in the French university system), by offering a translation from the French (carried out by Lindemann’s graduate students), supplies an important addition, which would otherwise not be accessible to many of us, to the dominant English-language scholarship on war. The overall result is very interesting, full of various insights, and profoundly innovative – hopefully the harbinger of a new departure in the study of war and its causes.

Eyal Ben-Ari
Professor of anthropology at Hebrew University, Jerusalem