**Types of War**

Although all wars are violent, not all wars are the same. In fact, there are many different types of wars, which can be classified according to which people actually fight, the intensity of the conflict, and the extent of combatants’ use of violence, among other factors.

Scholars generally describe five types of war:

1. Total war
2. Limited war
3. Guerrilla war
4. Civil war
5. Proxy war

**Total War**

A **total war** is a war in which combatants use every resource available to destroy the social fabric of the enemy. Total wars are highly destructive and are characterized by mass civilian casualties because winning a total war often requires combatants to break the people’s will to continue fighting. World Wars I and II were total wars, marked by the complete destruction of the civilian economy and society in many countries, including France, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, Great Britain, and Japan.

**Limited War**

A **limited war** is a war fought primarily between professional armies to achieve specific political objectives without causing widespread destruction. Although the total of civilian casualties may be high, combatants do not seek to completely destroy the enemy’s social and economic frameworks. The Persian Gulf War of 1990–1991 was a limited war in which the United States and its allies forcibly removed Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

**Guerrilla War**

A **guerrilla war** is a war in which one or both combatants use small, lightly armed militia units rather than professional, organized armies. Guerrilla fighters usually seek to topple their government, often enjoying the support of the people. These wars are often very long but also tend to be successful for the insurgents as evidenced by Mao Zedong’s victory over Chiang Kai-shek in China in the 1940s, the Vietcong’s victory over the United States in the Vietnam War, and the Mujahideen’s victory over the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

**Civil War**

A **civil war** is a war fought within a single country between or among different groups of citizens who want to control the government and do not recognize another group’s right to rule. Civil wars are almost always total wars because each side feels compelled to destroy the enemy’s political support base. Regional rifts, such as the American Civil War between the North and the South, characterize some civil wars, whereas other civil wars have been fought among ethnic rivals, religious rivals, and rival clans. Revolutions can spark civil wars as well.

**Proxy War**

A **proxy war** is a war fought by third parties rather than by the enemy states themselves. Many of the militarized conflicts during the Cold War, such as the Korean War and the Vietnam War, can be interpreted as proxy wars between the United States and the Soviet Union, neither of which wanted to fight each other directly.