

# The Wish for Peace vs. the Will to Wage War

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The incidence of war in human society is as pervasive as the wish for peace is universal. The use of force and the possibility of controlling it and so controlling others has preoccupied the minds of rulers and scholars alike since time immemorial, from Thucydides, Kautilya and Machiavelli to Karl Marx, Mao Zedong, Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger. But so too have some of the most charismatic and influential personalities in human history – from Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ to Mahatma Gandhi – reflected on the renunciation of force and the possibility of eliminating it from human relationships.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century captured the paradox only too well. On the one hand, we tried to emplace increasing normative, legislative and operational fetters on the right of states to go to war. Yet the last century turned out to be the most murderous in human history, with over 250 wars and more dead than in all previous wars of the past two thousand years. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has opened with a new kind of war, namely mass terror across borders.

How to explain the paradox? At one level of analysis, each conflict is unique and has its own distinctive attributes and dynamics. In addition, though, many of today's conflicts are peculiarly resistant to efforts at resolution because a set of adverse and contradictory logics tilts the balance toward their perpetuation.

To begin with, while almost all contemporary armed conflicts are internal, almost all international conflict resolution modalities are designed for inter-state warfare. The question of how to manage a future crisis in the Taiwan Straits – one of the major potential flashpoints in East Asia – is an example of an especially acute dilemma for the UN, given that China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and most countries accept its claim that the issue of Taiwan is an internal matter. The International Commission on

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Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) got around the philosophical difficulty with the imaginative formulation of the responsibility to protect,<sup>1</sup> which locates the responsibility of state and international agents on a responsibility continuum, and embeds the responsibility to intervene within the responsibility to prevent and rebuild on the time continuum.

Sadly, it takes two to make peace, but only one to keep conflicts going. Thus in Korea it has been suggested that the North cannot afford to make peace, for fear of regime identity being completely submerged in a unified Korea; it cannot afford to go to war, knowing that it would lose; and so its policy is to continue the conflict by maintaining tension at a level short of provoking war. The same comments have been adapted for Pakistan vis-à-vis India.<sup>2</sup>

Most long-lived conflicts develop an equilibrium and a set of vested interests which militate against efforts at finding peaceful solutions. In Kashmir, for example, a peaceful resolution of the world's most likely nuclear flashpoint would diminish the role of the military in Pakistani politics and destroy the privileged position that they have enjoyed for all of Pakistan's history. On the Indian side, the dispute with Pakistan is the most potent rallying focus for the Hindutva (Hindu-first) ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the dominant party in the coalition government in New Delhi. Peaceful relations between India and Pakistan would be damaging to the prospects of the BJP as a political party.

Sometimes the vested interest takes the form of financial gain or stakes. In the decade-long war between the Vietnamese-backed regime in power in Phnom Penh and the Khmer Rouge on the Thai-Vietnam border, some Thai generals made money from the illegal gem mining and smuggling, as well as from international aid flowing to the refugee camps. More recent examples of the profitable political economy of war include the so-called conflict diamonds in Angola and Sierra Leone. Aspects of global "uncivil society" -- for example those involved in trafficking women, arms and drugs, or moving men

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<sup>1</sup> *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre for ICISS, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Ramesh Thakur and Ralph Cossa, "Stuck between war and peace," *Japan Times*, 18 February 1999.

(mercenaries) and laundering money -- may also do very nicely out of protracted conflicts, thank you very much. Sometimes wars may start over control of lucrative resources; in other cases, they may be rooted in group grievances but may still end up being sustained by the greed of those who discover that profits can be made from fighting. Many of Africa's contemporary wars seem to fall into the pattern of greed and grievance.<sup>3</sup>

Then there is the persistence of competitive nationalisms despite the reality of increasing internationalization and globalization. In Kashmir, in an age of global media, politics, economics and terrorism, the secular nationalism of India collides with the religious nationalism of Pakistan and the ethnic nationalism of Kashmiris. Globalized information and telecommunications technology in the age of mass media, combined with the global diasporas of many ethnic communities, means that conflicts can be kept alive through appeals to kinship loyalties (and pocketbooks) of expatriate groups around the world. The British government, for example, was never happy about the role of the American Irish community in sustaining the armed struggle waged by the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The same applies with respect to the Government of Sri Lanka and the role of the Tamil expatriates vis-à-vis the long-running civil war in that country.

The logic of state building and nation building, alternative and potentially competing units of world order and affective political identity, can be contradictory. In idealized Western political theory and actual practice in the mature democracies, the state acts as the mediator and neutral arbiter of inter-group competition. In much of the developing world, in practice the state is itself one of the most prized assets for capture by one group in order to oppress other groups. If this is done on the basis of ethnonational differences of territorially bounded groups, the excluded and oppressed groups can launch wars of state formation based in their separate sense of national identity. Think of the Kosovars in Serbia, the Tamils in Sri Lanka, or the Timorese in Indonesia. Hence, to borrow Kal Holsti's

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<sup>3</sup> See, in particular, Mats R. Berdal and David M. Malone, eds., *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner for the International Peace Academy, 2000).

terminology, the cycle of “wars of national liberation” from colonial rule followed by “wars of national debilitation” of artificially constructed states.<sup>4</sup>

Or the structures of state authority can collapse if their institutional development is insufficiently resilient to absorb and channel rising demands for the authoritative allocation of goods, services and values, leading to failed states and complex humanitarian crises. How much of central Africa’s present armed violence can be laid at the doors of a Belgian colonial state that was essentially a predatory and rapacious state that did not pay heed to the need to develop the institutional capacity of its dependent colonies? Similarly, was it either fair or wise to have abandoned Afghanistan to its fate - which in due course became intertwined once more with that of the U.S. -- after the Soviets had been driven from that country? Terrorism highlights only too graphically the “nation-building” nexus between security and development.

The logics of steadfast resolution and negotiated resolution are at odds, as the Americans discovered during the domestic trauma of the Vietnam War. To resolve a conflict, we must recognize that there are at least two parties, both with elements of right and wrong, and that there is a need for flexibility and pragmatism that permits compromise and accommodation. National or religious zealotry fights against any of this: principles are neither negotiable nor for sale. Describing war as values-based rather than in pursuit of national interests, as in Kosovo in 1999, further circumscribes the scope for negotiations and compromise. And of course to say that you are either with us or against us (in the name of protecting freedom and defending diversity!) constricts the diplomatic space for mutual accommodation still more.

The logics of the past and future can be at war. If they are to enjoy peaceful coexistence, communities need to jettison the inherited baggage of historical hatreds. But competing myths are important for the social construction of political identity, and therefore history is a fiercely contested terrain, as the authors of officially approved history textbooks in Japan know only too well. How can one be a Jew today without internalizing the

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<sup>4</sup> Untitled lecture at “Think Canada” symposium, Tokyo, 17 April 2001.

collective consciousness of the Holocaust? Palestinian refugees view efforts to refuse them the right to repatriation as an attempt to deny their collective history and identity.

The logic of power is inconsistent with that of justice. Peace in the Middle East or on the Indian subcontinent cannot be grasped without bending to the military superiority of Israel and India. But no peace agreement will last if it is fundamentally unjust, denying the right of self-determination and the right to live in dignity free of daily humiliations to whole communities. Such an accord will rest on the temporary inability of the territorially revisionist Palestinians and Kashmiris to challenge the entrenched – but ultimately transient – might of status quo powers whose military presence is regarded as an unjust occupation. In the de facto territorial partition of Cyprus too there is a discrepancy between military reality and demographic composition. Occasionally the weak seek recourse against the strong in the logic of asymmetric warfare, including terrorism.

The logic of negotiation tends to be contradictory. The stronger see no reason to compromise. In the last general election, Israeli voters put the security of the in-group above justice for the out-group. The weaker fear that negotiations, if not delayed until parity or superiority has been attained, will force them into humiliating sellout of their cause. The Palestinians felt that the offer at Camp David was made on the assumption of their military weakness. They seek justice in full, not the crumbs of charity: that which was theirs and had been taken from them by force was being offered back to them as “concession,” and then too not in full. But what of historically informed justice for Jews?

Another problem lies in the contradictory logics of peace and justice. Peace is forward-looking, problem-solving and integrative, requiring reconciliation between past enemies within an all-inclusive community. Justice is backward-looking, finger-pointing and retributive, requiring acknowledgment and atonement, if not trial and punishment, of the perpetrators of past crimes. Japan has found it extraordinarily difficult to establish fully normal relations with key neighbors because they profess not to be convinced of the genuineness of official Japanese apologies for wartime atrocities. (By contrast, many Japanese argue that the victimhood industry has been too profitable for too many neighboring countries for them to give it up easily and move on.)

The pursuit of human rights violators can delay and impede the effort to establish conditions of security so that displaced people can return home and live in relative peace once again. But while mercy has a role to play in reconstituting society after trauma, justice has many more, and more fundamental, roles to play beyond bringing wrongdoers to account: acknowledging the suffering of victims, educating the public, deterring future criminal atrocities, establishing universal justice: in sum, easing the Kantian transition from barbarism to culture.

The question of how best to handle the ghosts of past misdeeds of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, or Suharto in Indonesia, remains deeply divisive. Many in South Africa would have liked to see all those guilty of criminal activity during the apartheid era tried and punished for their crimes. The ANC government decided that the criminal justice route would only serve to perpetuate the old group-based social-racial cleavages, and opted instead for a truth and reconciliation commission (which did *not* offer blanket amnesty). Not all people in Northern Ireland are comfortable with amnesty for past violence, including possibly murder.

The tension must be reconciled on a case-by-case basis rather than according to a rigid formula. And it is best resolved by the countries concerned, whether in Chile, South Africa or Northern Ireland, not by outsiders. In none of these cases was the solution negotiated by the political elites supported by all segments of society. Europeans in particular must resist the temptation to embark on a new wave of judicial colonialism against Latin Americans, Africans and Asians. If the international community is going to step in where domestic authorities prove unable or unwilling to try cases of crimes against humanity, it is better to seek recourse in universal institutions like an international criminal court. This remains problematic for a great democracy with a self-sustaining belief in its identity as a virtuous power.

The democratic peace thesis holds that democracies do not go to war against one another and that part of the reason for this lies in the beneficial impact of open public debate and lack of public support for waging war against other democracies. Yet, empirically, some of the oldest and most prominent democracies are among the most involved in warfare, if against non-democracies. On the one hand, this may be because dictators too often misperceive democracies as weak and prone to appeasement. On the

other hand, it could be that leaders who may be inclined to negotiate peace are held back for fear of electoral consequences or of being destroyed for their daring. The fate of Ehud Barak of Israel is instructive. He offered more to the Palestinians than was conceivable just a short while ago. Ariel Sharon went to Temple Mount in September 2000 and provoked a Palestinian uprising, the downfall of Barak and his own election as prime minister. Would an elected leader of India or Pakistan dare to make concessions to the enemy over Kashmir -- or the leaders of Greece and Turkey vis-à-vis Cyprus -- when political rivals are waiting in the wings to ridicule and exploit any "sellout"? (On the other hand, it may be the case that when casualties mount in an "alien" war where national interests are not clearly engaged, democratic pressure coming from a rising pacifist movement is more likely to force the troops home.)

The moment when opportunities arrive for making peace may not be the most propitious for forging a consensus to make the necessary decisions and compromises. Human history is full of missed opportunities. But there may be good political reasons why these opportunities could not be grasped at their most favorable time. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat missed his moment at Camp David in July 2000: he simply could not have sold that package to the Palestinian people and his fellow Arabs at that time. For the first time in 50 years, India under Atal Behari Vajpayee showed signs of a willingness to engage in a peace process in Kashmir. But the political, economic and religious mix in Pakistan was inauspicious for achieving liftoff of the peace process. Both Cyprus and the Korean Peninsula have seen many false dawns attendant upon sunshine policies. Could the same peace agreements have been signed over Cambodia and Northern Ireland five or ten years earlier, or did we have to wait in both cases for crisis maximation and mutual exhaustion?

The final contradiction is between war as the historical method of settling conflicts and its contemporary illegitimacy, but without alternative mechanisms that are equally decisive. The logic of force is essentially escalatory. It is difficult to impress upon nationalistically-inflamed passions the enormous disparity between the ends sought, the means used and the price paid. A good example of the gap between goals, means and results is Slobodan Milosevic's decade-long quest to create a Greater Serbia. During the Kosovo War in 1999, while waging war against Milosevic, London and Washington urged restraint on India in responding to the Kargil invasion from across the Line of Control in

Kashmir. In 2001–02, while waging war against the Taliban in Afghanistan for having harbored terrorists, London and Washington counseled restraint on New Delhi in responding to the terrorist attack on India's parliament on 13 December 2001. Israel has appropriated the U.S. war on terror for its own campaign against Palestinian terrorism. Who in Washington is going to convince Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that the ruthless application of massive force does not work?

Does this mean then that warfare is the normal condition of human society, and peace the exception that requires explanation? Not really. But consider this: Three of the most dangerous long-lived conflicts are in Korea, Kashmir and Palestine. One Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded in the Korean context, none in the Kashmir, several in the Middle East – which at the time of writing is in flames. How many more Nobel prizes will it take for peace to take hold in the Middle East?