

A Note on War and Peace

“ ‘Well, what makes you go to war?’ asked Pierre.

“What makes me? I don’t know. I have to.” “

Leo Tolstoy, ***War and Peace***

Assumptions About War and Peace

It has been said that the history of warfare is the history of mankind. It could be said that equally the history of peace is the history of mankind. Just as every moment that has ever been can be described as having been either in the daytime or in the nighttime, every land and every people at any given time can be described as either having been at war or in a state of peace. As a point of fact, this state of war or of peace is dependent upon both space and time. At any given moment in all of known history, some land and some people have been in a state of war, while another land and another people has been in a state of peace, just as it is always daytime and always night time, somewhere. All lands and all people, at one time or another, have been in a state of war and at other times in a state of peace. Sometimes, people experience peace at home and war abroad. In other times, people are in a state of war at home, while they find a peaceful refuge abroad. And in some terrible times, it seems as though war threatens to envelope the entire world. Still, many of us dare to imagine a scenario in which the entire world enjoys, even if only for a moment, a state of peace.

We will make certain assumptions about this business of war and peace. We will assume that peace is preferable to war. We will take it as a common goal to end war and to bring about peace, both in the particular and in the general sense. We make the presumption that some acts of violence are justified, such as acts of self-defense, and that some acts of violence are unjustified, such as unprovoked acts of aggression. We make the assertion that in all cases of violence, whether justified or not, a lack of violence is preferable and is, in fact, the ultimate goal of justified violence. When violence is the only means available to counteract aggression, the objective is to utilize the least amount of force necessary to end the threat and to move all impacted parties toward peace and an absence of violence. Even in the face of unjustified violence, when violent opposition and resistance would be justified, non-violent means, if feasible and effective, are preferable and represent the greatest hope for a durably peaceful outcome.

We also put forward the assumption that when we find ourselves in armed conflict, there exists certain standards by which we can evaluate (1) the justification for entering into that conflict, (2) the manner in which the conflict is carried out, and (3) the consequences of our actions. For the purposes of evaluating the conflict centered around Israel/Palestine, and especially the *Pathway to Peace*, we will be diligent in reporting the stated intentions and motivations of each actor, and when value judgments are made regarding the legitimacy or justification of any actions, we will

be certain to present the various positions held by both the actor and the receivers of those actions. We ultimately want to operate upon a common set of ethical standards by which the actions of all actors are judged, but we do not want to be held up on our *Pathway to Peace* by highlighting one interpretation of events to the exclusion of countering views of the same events. This is not some balancing act where we try to honor all perspectives for the pragmatic purpose of trying to keep everyone in the conversation. This is honoring the reality that each affected party experiences the same events from their own, unique perspective, and when two people experience the same event in very different ways, each of their experience is real, valid, and must be considered in order for us to reach some objective conclusion

War and Peace for Palestine/Israel

Israel/Palestine and the inhabitants therein are not immune to the War and Peace dynamic characterizing the world as we know it. As we explore the history of this land and these people, as well as the contemporary reality of the same, the periods of peace are as informative as are the periods of war. We must examine the aspects of this story that are defined by conflict, so that we can reach our ultimate destination that we choose to define as a state of peace, an absence of conflict. As we explore the conflict in depth, we should not lose sight of the elements of peace that have been demonstrated throughout history and that represent the goal toward which we are working: a durable peace for all impacted parties, with freedom and opportunity for hope afforded to all.

Characteristics of Combat

In this study, we will characterize combative actions based upon a few distinctions. First, we will consider the motivation and objectives of an action. Is the action one of conquest or other aggression, self-defense, or preemption to a perceived threat? What are the political and/or military objectives of that action? Are the primary targets of the action military or civilian in nature? What are the intended and unintended consequences of the action and to what degree did the action achieve the objective?

Modern standards for the conduct of warfare will serve as our general ethical framework in making value judgments in regard to specific combative actions. For example, we will accept that there is a distinction between combatants and civilians and that combatants provide a service of combat on behalf of the civilian population. Therefore, in evaluating the target of an action, the civilian and/or military nature of the target is relevant. We will also recognize the concept of proportionality. Proportionality takes on two distinct forms: (1) in terms of the sum of damage caused by a response to an action and (2) the proportion of civilian casualty in relation to the military/political purpose of the action. We will also consider the nature of weapons used and the manner in which they are used. We will ultimately make value judgments regarding specific actions, and we want to use a common set of standards that apply to each side of an action-reaction dynamic, equally, maintaining fairness and justice.

Inflammatory and Conciliatory Language

There are certain words that we will be reluctant to utilize when describing actions and actors, with “terrorism” and “genocide” being two of them. There are cases in our story where these words might appropriately apply, but they create room for debate that will not serve our purpose of reaching an objective perspective and subsequent solutions. When examining actions that could be considered to be “terrorism” or “genocide”, there will be differing opinions as to whether or not these terms are appropriate in those specific cases. Instead of focusing the debate on whether or not the term applies, we should focus instead on the details of the actions in question, utilizing the characteristics of combat detailed above. We will briefly examine these often inflammatory terms here, exposing some of the challenges created by using them and highlighting a core principle that is sacrificed when these terms are used as a means of condemnation of one party or another.

While “terrorism” carries a number of connotations, depending upon who is using the term and when, we will consider two potential factors that we could use to categorize an action as an act of terrorism (1) using violence to create shock and fear for the purpose affecting a specific political change and/or (2) disproportionately targeting civilians in what would otherwise be a military action intending to achieve a political and/or military objective. As discussed, we can utilize the characteristics of combat to describe any action, capturing the factors implied by this term, while avoiding disagreements where two perspectives agree with the facts of the case but disagree on the applicability of the term. This debate over language obfuscates the underlying point that should be discussed: was the action justified? The implied position of moral superiority in many cases where this term is invoked does not hold up to scrutiny. U.S. President George Bush declaring a strategy of “shock and awe” in Iraq, creating an emotional response that might encourage Iraqi soldiers to surrender their position, thereby bringing a quicker conclusion to that war, fits definition (1) of terrorism above. The U.S. dropping atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki accelerating the end of World War II fits definition (2) of terrorism above. In both of these cases, the intended objective of these actions was to limit the ultimate loss of life by creating such a shock that the conflict would end, representing a decrease in the projected loss of life if the conflict were to continue on its current trajectory.

There are also cases in which the action in question is in response to violent aggression by a vastly more powerful adversary, where going head-to-head with the aggressor on the battlefield is not feasible, and guerilla military tactics are required. In this scenario, even if the smaller, non-aggressing party avoids definition (2) above by limiting their targets to purely military resources, not having a practical potential to significantly impact the larger force’s overall military capacity, the guerilla force’s primary option is to strike the larger military in such a way that it draws broader attention to the conflict and erodes popular support for the aggressing military, decreasing their willingness to fight. These are examples of basic military strategy and tactics, studied in military academies across the world and implemented by sanctioned militaries as routine. Yet when carried out by non-State actors, regardless of the justification of their struggle, these same methods are characterized as “terrorism”. In the case of insurgencies that prove successful and ultimately enter the sphere of political legitimacy, with the militia becoming

a state military, are these methods still considered terroristic or have they themselves become legitimized with statehood? As we explore the story of Palestine/Israel, whether we are looking at the Stern Gang, the Irgun, the PLO, or Hamas, there is no value to labeling some, all, or none of them as “terrorists”. Where we do find value is exploring their stated purposes, their actions, and the consequences of those actions.

“Genocide” carries similar baggage as to “terrorism”. Certainly, the term does apply to various episodes in our story, and we will not shy from the word when individuals or groups explicitly advocate or act deliberately toward the eradication of a specific group. But any time there is not clear evidence of this intent, demonstrating a de facto state of genocide is not necessary and only creates opportunity for pedantic debate over use of terms. In these cases, the topic is better served by explicitly describing the specific context, not allowing contention over a specific term to obfuscate the fundamental questions. In this same vein, one term we will not shy away from is “ethnic-cleansing”. When genocide is the appropriate descriptor of actions, those actions are in the service of ethnic-cleansing, but genocide is only the most extreme of multiple tools employed to carry out ethnic-cleansing. In our exploration of Palestine/Israel, ethnic-cleansing as a strategy to achieve specific political objectives is central to the story, and we will not be able to avoid facing that directly.

There is an underlying principle that is important to acknowledge if we want this effort to lead us to a durable and lasting peace for all parties. We have presented that certain, inflammatory language can distract from the fundamental questions, devolving our careful analysis into a debate over legitimacy of actors and the relative moral justification of the same. There is also a certain right and degree of empathy that even the aggressor in one case or another deserves. As we discuss topics like colonization, apartheid, and military rule, and how we might go about dismantling them, those that currently advocate for them must be considered for equal and fair treatment after those systems are dismantled. We must acknowledge that those engaged in colonization today did not invent colonization. Those that establish and maintain military rule come themselves from a perspective of having been ruled militarily. The great, democratic nations of the world that are being called upon to lead the charge to dismantle these oppressive systems have themselves been the oppressors in the not too distant past. Many of the evils that we seek to combat have been characteristics of power for hundreds if not thousands of years. We must oppose tyranny, and active tyrants must be stopped from their course of action. Still, those that knowingly or unknowingly support and enable those tyrants must be included in the “all” for whom we want lives of freedom and opportunity for peace and prosperity. Our goal should be to put an end to oppression and to foster peaceful coexistence among mankind, not to divide the people between “good guys” and “bad guys”, perpetuating an endless battle among common men and women. Ultimately, lines will have to be drawn between just and unjust, ethical and unethical, and, on some common basis, right and wrong, but room must always be left for every individual to choose upon which side of history he/she will stand. We will avoid language which brands any particular individual or group as the enemy. Even when we identify specific institutions that must be reformed or eliminated, the individuals associated with those institutions must be provided with a pathway for participation in the new, fair and just peace. In cases where explicit crimes have been committed, those accused have the right to due process

in the evaluation of charges against them, including the right to proffer a defense to those claims.

There is nothing to be gained by creating hyperbolic heroes and villains along our *Pathway to Peace*.