War or Peace?

Dennis Hardy

War does not determine who is right, only who is left.[1]

The question of war or peace is at the very heart of human survival, let alone human dignity. At its most basic, the idea that the purpose of life is to remove it from others defies logic as well as ethics. Wars are, in the most literal sense, inhuman. What, after all, is the justification for the human species if not to respect others, to fulfil its potential, and to care for the planet? The reality, however, is that this is not a view with which everyone agrees. In contrast with what one might think would be a natural predilection for peace, violent conflict has always attracted its own fervent advocates. This paper is no more than an attempt to step back from the fray and try to disentangle the various arguments on both sides – the promotion of war as opposed to peace. Above all, it asks why, after all these years of human development, this is even an issue.

The original locus for this discussion was the Indo-Pacific. In following the course of events in this crucial region, time and again one is confronted with the nagging question of why – in spite of rhetoric to the contrary – peace is so often marginalized. Why are so many of the constituent nations either stoking the fires of conflict or, worse, already engaged in warlike acts? Nor is it just a question of nations opposed to nations: civil wars in the region are no less corrosive. The deeper one delves, the more it becomes clear that there are existential questions to be answered. In subsequent articles, the ideas that surface in this introductory piece will be tested in relation to specific case studies.

Swords into plowshares

… and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.[2]

The above exhortation, taken from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, has for millennia been shared by peace-lovers from all quarters. Its simple imagery makes good sense. But, of course, the unbroken sequence of wars demonstrates that the sentiment has had little or no influence. Wars are perennial, peace is not. For those who believe that this is inevitable (if not also a good thing) the evidence is on their side. Wars have been fought from time

[1] Anon. Cited by activists for decades and, probably erroneously, attributed to the peace campaigner, Bertrand Russell.
[2] *Isaiah, 2:4*, Old Testament, King James Bible.

immemorial. The strange thing is that one might have expected the opposite, namely, that peace would have been the natural accompaniment of human evolution. Yet, while there has been so much material progress – in science and technology, in trade and communication – an attachment to war over millennia has not appreciably changed. With every step taken forward, it seems that two are taken backwards. Peace remains the poor relation. At least, the obvious disparity is not without attempts to even the score and one can look to two main sources to do so. One is religion and the other a set of ideals that than can loosely be described as utopian.

In the name of God

Organized religion claims a leading role in championing peace. Each year, for instance, on Easter Sunday, the incumbent Pope appears on the balcony overlooking the central square of the Vatican Basilica. Speaking for 1.4 billion Catholics, but addressed to an even wider audience, he calls for peace in the world's conflict zones. His basic message is much the same from one year to the next. In March 2024 he once again preached his familiar theme:

> *Let us not allow the current hostilities to continue to have grave repercussions on the civil population, by now at the limit of its endurance, and above all on the children. How much suffering we see in the eyes of the children: the children in those lands at war have forgotten how to smile! With those eyes, they ask us: Why? Why all this death? Why all this destruction? War is always an absurdity, war is always a defeat! Let us not allow the strengthening winds of war to blow on Europe and the Mediterranean. Let us not yield to the logic of weapons and rearming. Peace is never made with arms, but with outstretched hands and open hearts.*[3]

There were tens of thousands of believers in the Vatican square on that day and many more listening to the Pope's words by virtual means; because of modern communications, his reach is greater than it has ever been. But does anyone *really* listen? Has this message become so trite that it no longer (if, indeed, it ever did) resonates as intended? Are warmongers open to persuasion? If one includes in the wider Christian audience both Protestants and members of the Orthodox Church, the total reaches 2.4 billion. This is surely a powerful lobby. But the evidence, measured in terms of effectiveness, suggests otherwise.

And, of course, Christians are not alone in identifying with peace. Some 1.8 billion Muslims, in their everyday discourse, greet each other with the exhortation, 'peace be with you'. In fact, the Koran carries within it numerous declarations to support this.[4] The problem is that, for outsiders, Islam has a bad track record. In spite of past instances of

[3] The Vatican, 31 March, 2024.

[4] See, for instance, Ibrahim Kalin, 'Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition'. *Islamic Studies*, Vol 44, No 3, Autumn 2005.

tolerance towards followers of other religions, its recent treatment of Christians and Jews in Islamic countries is abject. One of the first symbolic acts in the streets of post-Assad Syria was to burn a Christmas tree. Non-believers are described as infidels, and deep divisions surround the unforgiving notion of *jihad.* Ask people today what they most associate with the religion of Mohammed and a common answer will be terrorism.

Likewise, Hinduism, the third largest religion in the world, with 1.2 billion followers (mostly living in India), offers its own prescriptions for peace. 'Be the change that you wish to see in the world', said Mahatma Gandhi (Hinduism's greatest exponent of non-violence).[5] Following independence, India subscribed to the idea of non-alignment and joined Sri Lanka and Tanzania in support of the designation of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace.[6] That was before the nation itself acquired nuclear weapons and saw the closing of the gap between Hinduism and nationalism. The flame of peace is too easily snuffed out.

One reason why religion as a fount of peace is not taken to heart is because it is too often itself a combatant. Muslims and Christians famously fought each other not only in the Crusades but, as a recent book describes, in many other confrontations too over the past 1300 years.[7] Each side has at different times committed acts of unimaginable cruelty. In turn, Jews invoke religion to support their claim to the land of Israel; Catholicism was enforced by heinous means in the Spanish Inquisition; and an unresolved number of citizens died in an orgy of killing between Hindus and Muslims in the Partition of the sub-continent in 1947. Nor is it just a case of one religion in conflict with another; divisions within any one doctrine can be equally destructive. Under a common banner of Christianity, Protestants and Catholics have periodically engaged in ferocious attacks on each other. Likewise, Sunnis and Shias are irreconcilable because of what might seem to the outside world no more than a minor doctrinal difference. One way and another, religion is hardly a role model for the peace it espouses.

In mitigation, the task of drawing the line between war and peace is not always straightforward. What about the apparent contradiction of a 'just war'?[8] The implication is that some wars can be justified – and, indeed, fought in the name of God if certain conditions prevail. Foremost amongst these is a belief that the enemy is inherently evil; Nazism was a case in point with which most of the world agreed. But even if there is unanimity, there still remains the moral question of killing innocent citizens. Was there a case for the Dresden fire bombs or, even more questionably, the dropping of atomic bombs

[5] The quote is undoubtedly Gandhian although it is often suggested that he did not utter these exact words.
[6] P.S. Jayaramu, 'Indian Ocean as a zone of peace: problems and perspectives'. *The Indian Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 47, No.2, 1986.
[7] Simon Mayall, *The House of War: The struggle between Christendom and the Caliphate*. Oxford: Osprey, 2024.
[8] For example, 'Ethics - War. What is a just war?'. BBC, 2006.

on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? For all the best intentions to restrict fatalities to armed forces, this is never achieved; in the case of the Second World War, between 70 and 85 million individuals – citizens as well as soldiers (most of whom were, in any case, not ideologically driven) – were killed. A just war, for all its moral strictures, is still a war.

Is it wrong to be utopian?

An alternative source of peace can be found, not in doctrinaire tracts and the weight of religious hierarchies, but in the ideas of philosophers and others who see peace as a natural condition. From these alternative perspectives, there is no moral ambiguity. One can look, for instance, to a long tradition of utopianism, where all that is wrong in the world is put to rights. Invariably, in utopia, peaceful coexistence is simply how things are (although, strangely, in Thomas More's portrayal of such a place – which gives its name to the whole genre – there is still a place for war).[9] For most utopians, though, the world as we know it is, unambiguously, turned upside down.[10]

Gandhi was a utopian in one sense but far too practical in another. He has already been mentioned in this paper for his commitment to non-violent change, but he, in turn, acknowledged a debt to predecessors. Leo Tolstoy is frequently cited amongst these, not in this context for his talismanic novel, *War and Peace*, but for his influential writings on social change.[11] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, he was feted by groups of anarchists and other reformers for his vision of a decentralized society at peace with itself. Tolstoy believed that Christianity had lost its way but could be guided back to the essential message of the Sermon on the Mount. In such a vision, true community would be restored, with goods shared and peace practiced with one's neighbours. But first, he argued, people themselves had to change. The mistake of political revolutions was to change institutions in the expectation that human character would somehow evolve in response. If radical change is to be achieved, however, experience suggests that this is the wrong way round. But how could it be different?

Tolstoy was in many ways an unlikely advocate for the kind of society he idealized. As the owner of a large estate in Russia, it might have seemed incongruent to argue for simplicity, denounce property and all the material trappings of modern society. But his ideas resonated amongst a section of the population (mainly in England and America) who desperately wanted to see this kind of fundamental change. The most devoted of his followers made the long journey to the Russian interior to pay homage in person to Tolstoy – who, in sympathy to his cause, met them dressed as a peasant. He would reiterate his basic belief that capitalism could only effectively be confronted by fraternalism. To do that,

[9] Originally published in Latin in 1516, Thomas More's *Utopia* allowed for war in prescribed circumstances – to defend itself, to defend a friend, or to free itself from oppression.
[10] See, for instance, Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.
[11] Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. London: Scott, 1894.

there had first to be a revolution of consciousness, and that would be achieved not through violent action but by learning to live together. And, in turn, the creation of small communities – as microcosms of the ideal form of society – could provide the right kind of environment to learn and journey together in the direction of the new life.

In many ways, Tolstoy was preaching to the converted; those who met him on his estate, and many more who discussed his works at home, represented only a tiny minority of world opinion. But their enthusiasm was infectious and, like a stone thrown into the middle of a pond, they believed the ripples would soon spread outwards. It was pure idealism, of course, but what was wrong with that? Towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the next, many small communities, on both sides of the Atlantic, were formed, allowing members to experiment with associated ideas.[12] They were all opposed to the iniquities of capitalism and saw the way forward as broadly Tolstoyan. Their shared ideal was a decentralized society with common bonds, not only with other communities, but as a new way in which the world as a whole could evolve. A fairer world marked by cooperation and, of course, one without wars. During the day, they tilled the land to grow their own food and made furniture and other products by hand. In the evenings they gathered round to discuss new ideas. Compared to the wider development of industrial societies, progress was infinitesimally slow, but at least it was in the right direction. With a single blow, though, it was all swept aside by the outbreak of the First World War.

Even then, pacifists retained their faith, as they did again, some twenty years later, in the second global conflagration. Conscientious objectors held their ground but they were, at best, tolerated (and often not even that); the rest of the world was too busy at war to listen to their well-crafted arguments to abstain. It was not before the 1960s that a peace movement again found its voice, this time against the grim backcloth of the Cold War in a nuclear age, and the emotive events surrounding the conflict in Vietnam. Protestors, blaming the continuing advance of capitalism and the influence of the military-industrial war machine, gave rise to a new generation of community formation. Communes, as they were renamed, were located widely in urban as well as rural areas, concentrated in North America but also in other parts of the world.[13] This time they made their presence felt in mainstream society, leading the way in social issues like equal rights for women, environmentalism and organic food.

A measure of the influence of the commune movement is that many of the 'outlandish' experiments they pursued are now quite normal. The only major exception was a universal acceptance of peace. Let the people dress differently, allow women rights they never had before, and raise crops without pesticides: but the central issue of peace was not up for debate; or, at least, people could debate it as much as they wanted, but the great divide

[12] Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Longman, 1979.
[13] Yaacov Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993

between war and peace remained as wide as ever. Only briefly, in the last decade of the twentieth century, did it seem that there might be room for change on this front too.

Suddenly, like the sun breaking through previously dense cloud, two events occurred which changed the world. The first, in 1989, saw the demolition of the Berlin War, the second (two years later) the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Together, they brought about the end of the Cold War. For some 45 years, from the end of the Second World War, capitalist and communist nations faced each other across an ideological divide. From time to time, proxy wars broke out – on the Korean Peninsula, and in the jungles of Vietnam – but, with both sides holding vast stocks of nuclear weapons, peace of a kind was maintained through the threat of mutually assured destruction. It may have been a 'cold' rather than a 'hot' war but no less terrifying for that. Only when the USSR was dissembled could the rest of the world breathe again.

Having lived with the threat of war for so long, the sudden prospect of peace took everyone by surprise. New nations were formed from the disintegration of the Soviet Union, bringing liberation for long-repressed populations. In the media, there were various depictions of a dove holding a sprig from an olive tree in its beak. Hope was in the air. People spoke optimistically of the conversion of military hardware, budgets and human energy to peaceful ends – from swords to plowshares. But all too quickly the clouds rolled back and once again the world reverted to its more familiar scenario of nations facing nations, with the prospect of peace very much in the background.

Plowshares into swords

And Death fell with me, like a deepening moan.[14]

Wilfred Owen was one of a number of poets who wrote about the First World War, based on their own experience of life and death in the trenches.[15] They tell it like it was: the reality of trying to survive the intense cold, their comrades blinded by poison gas, friends next to them blown apart by enemy shells, the chilling sound of a whistle ushering them into a line of fire, knowing that most would be mowed down. Even those who somehow physically survived years of conflict, returned as broken souls – their minds shattered and recurring nightmares reminding them of all they had seen. The picture portrayed is one of inescapable horror, far removed from the tales of glory recorded in official annals. There is nothing glorious about war. And yet, unbelievably, those who have not experienced it firsthand are quick to forget, all too soon preparing for the next conflict. So terrible was

[14] Wilfred Owen, 'The Show', extract from one of his war poems, depicting the horrors of the First World War.
[15] See, for instance, Brian Gardner, ed., *Up the Line to Death*: *The war poets 1914-1918.* London: Methuen, 1964.

the Great War, as it was erroneously called – there was nothing great about it, except the scale of conflict – that it was soon dubbed 'the war to end all wars'. Nothing, though, was further from the truth and barely twenty years passed before the nations were once again at each other's throats.

So who are the people who are always ready to regroup and order the charge once more? Who is unequivocally on the side of war? It is not enough to say that war is caused by a few evil individuals? Certainly, there is no shortage of these – sadistic and psychopathic leaders who care nothing for the lives of ordinary people. But there are also more generic answers to explain the thirst for war. One source is to be found in ideas which rationalize war; another is motivated by monetary gain; and a third comes down to the complexity of human nature.

Fighting talk

'A good war sanctifies any cause' claimed the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.[16] Writing in the late-nineteenth-century Germany, he framed his arguments around the idea of 'a higher justice, tempered by love, and aiming at developing what is godlike in humanity'. In this way, he could argue that individuals and, indeed, nations, were justified in going to war. Some of his contemporaries, like Friedrich von Bernhardi, were even more strident in arguing the case, seeing war as nothing less than a biological necessity:

> *The struggle for survival is the fundamental law of life; and… any attempt to abolish war entirely is in direct opposition to this fundamental law. The struggle for existence is good biologically in so far that it restricts unhealthy development, and thus keeps the race healthy and strong. In the same way he regards war as really a biological necessity.*[17]

In other words, war would have a cleansing effect, rather like weeding the fields to let the best plants flourish. Given Germany's role in the two world wars, it is not hard to see where these ideas of eugenics and the creation of a 'master race' would lead.

From a very different political standpoint, some anarchists veered away from their generally peace-loving heartland, to argue that violence is an essential step towards fundamental social change. The main task of war is to clear away what is already there. How can one build a new society, the argument goes, while the old institutions remain? In fact, as Gandhi demonstrated, it can be achieved by non-violent methods. But not everyone who espoused anarchism necessarily agreed. They were attracted, instead, by the conflicting idea that power will not be relinquished by the state voluntarily, and that force has to be met with force.

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[16] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A book for all and none*, reprinted 2019. Fingerprint Publishing.
[17] Philip H. Fogel, 'Nietzsche and the present war', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1915), pp. 449-457.

> *For two people to live in peace they must both want peace; if one insists on using force to oblige the other to work for him and serve him, then the other, if he wishes to retain his dignity as a man and not be reduced to abject slavery, will be obliged, in spite of his love of peace, to resist force with adequate means.*[18]

From yet another political perspective – seen as a contributor to emergent fascism – the Italian Futurists in the early twentieth century espoused war as the most effective means of change.[19] Their overriding goal was to replace the society around them, which had evolved gradually over the years, with a totally modern version. In newly unified Italy, it would allow the young nation to make its own future. The old was to be destroyed and everything new to be welcomed. It was intended as a sudden and total transformation, and how better to achieve this than through the cleansing power of war?

The historic cities of Rome, Venice and Florence would be replaced by new centres of industry like Milan. Old buildings would be torn down, to be replaced by modern constructions of concrete, steel and glass, reaching to the sky. And in a paean to speed, the motor car, express trains and aircraft belonged to the future. In their methods, as in their objectives, the Futurists were out to shock. In 1909, under the name of Filippo Marinetti, they issued a manifesto, in which their views on war could not have been more strident:

> *There is no more beauty except in strife. No masterpiece without aggression… We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women.*[20]

As the First World War approached, their excitement grew and, at least true to their ideals, they threw themselves into battle, with only some of them returning. Whether their 'beautiful ideas' remained worth dying for is left as conjecture.

Profits of war

In contrast with extremist ideas, a more powerful case for war is made by corporations for which there are vast profits to be made. It would be easy to explain this simply as an inherent feature of capitalism but no less invidious is the parallel interest of socialist governments, which also stand to gain from successful wars. True, in all cases the national debt will rise and loss of life is inevitable but, in the eyes of the instigators, costs are balanced by gains in terms of national glory and the regeneration of sluggish economies.

Behind the scenes, the 'deep state' is at work. Arms manufacturers work closely with politicians to ensure that, when the time comes, industry is ready to provide everything

[18] Vernon Richards, ed. *Malatesta*: *Life and Ideas*, 1984 (2015 edition). Oakland CA: PM Press, p.54.
[19] Filippo Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism'. Originally published in *Le Figaro,* 20 February 1909.
[20] *Ibid.*

that is needed. Weapons for combat forces, advanced missile systems, warships and fighter planes, if not already in store, will readily roll off the production lines. The level of expenditure has never been more than at the present time, a result of ever more sophisticated weaponry with destructive capacity, as well as a profusion of conflicts. Budget restrictions, regularly applied in peacetime, are rapidly lifted, to be paid for later through increased taxation. War makes its own rules.

Not only behind the scenes, deals are also struck in plain sight between politicians and military providers. Vice-President Dick Cheney, for instance, who served under George W. Bush, was a former CEO of Halliburton, an oil-services company that also provides construction and military support services. Although, on becoming Vice-President of the USA, he could no longer hold his corporate post, close connections clearly continued. Various contracts were awarded to his previous firm, with inevitable questions at the time about the propriety of the awards.[21]

The fact is that prospects of war can be seen as good news amongst those who stand to gain financially. Just watch the markets to see a sudden rise in the prices of mineral stocks and share values for the providers of military hardware. So, too, there are numerous service industries which stand to gain – making and delivering long-life food to the frontlines; providing units of temporary accommodation; and extra clothing for extreme weather conditions. In these various sectors it is boom time. The evidence is overwhelming, researched by bodies such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Numerous articles support the assertion that war is painful for most but profitable for some, as for instance, one by a researcher in this field, Thalif Deen:

> *If and when the devastating military conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza come to an end, the ultimate winners will not be the Russians, the Americans or the Israelis but the world's arms manufacturers – contemptuously described as 'merchants of death'. And so will be the winners in a rash of conflicts and civil wars in Syria, Myanmar, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan and Afghanistan. The latest report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) points out revenues from sales of arms and military services by the 100 largest companies in the industry reached $632 billion in 2023, a real-terms increase of 4.2 per cent compared with 2022.*[22]

War can also stimulate technological innovation, with lasting value well beyond the period of conflict. Of course, when the fighting stops, rebuilding starts. Architectural consultants line up for lucrative commissions, building contractors prepare to set up local teams, and, while battles are still raging, suppliers of essential materials will already be organizing supply chains.

[21] Lee Drutman and Charlie Gray, 'Cheney, Halliburton and the spoils of war'. *Citizen Works*, 4 April 2003.
[22] Thalif Deen, 'Who are the ultimate winners in the world's ongoing military conflicts?'. Inter Press Service, 2 December 2024.

Is human nature the real problem?

Different reasons can be found to explain why nations choose to go to war. Economic competition, coveted resources across boundaries or the lure of room for expansion are amongst the most common motives. Political machinations, where war distracts the attention of voters away from problems at home is another. Conflicting ideologies, too – such as communism v. capitalism, autocracy v. democracy – are sufficient to start a conflagration. Why else did America engage in a costly and, in the end, humiliating war in Vietnam? And one can never ignore the critical influence of power-crazed leaders who will stop at nothing to rule the world; egotism and sadism lurk not far away from destructive acts.

Any one or combination of these plays its part. But there is an underlying factor, too, in which human nature is itself the root cause. Unpalatable though it is, suppose all wars stem from the consistent fact that humans possess an innate urge to fight. We are simply not very nice. No one would wish to admit that – accepting culpability for this most inhuman form of behaviour – but the nagging possibility has to be faced. It runs against the grain to suggest that people might be inherently more inclined to favour war rather than peace. Surely we are better than that? Or are we? However much we might wish otherwise, the facts are compelling. Human history is a history of wars. From the time of the earliest written records to the present day, wars have never for long been absent. Is this because people are naturally belligerent rather than peace-loving? Was the twentieth-century philosopher, Bertrand Russell, right when he declared that 'war grows out of ordinary human nature'? [23]

Admittedly against the flow of emergent liberal ideas and religious belief in the inner goodness of humans, the English philosopher in the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes, expounded the idea that people were not really very pleasant at all. Left to their own devices, he warned that life would be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.[24] Seduced by the prospect of greater wealth and for fear of being overpowered by others, the natural inclination of humanity is the making of war. The only way to prevent this slide into oblivion, Hobbes argued, was to enforce order through a strong state. That is all very well, say his critics, but who controls the state? Be careful what you wish for. After all, when it comes to preventing war, the records demonstrate that totalitarianism is hardly the answer. On the contrary. In fact, in the years that followed the publication of Hobbes's seminal book, *Leviathan,* his ideas have been spurned for other reasons too in favour of more palatable ideologies. But the underlying claim that humans are culpable has never been conclusively discredited.

[23] Bertrand Russell (2015). 'Why Men Fight: A Method of Abolishing the International Duel'. Lulu Press, p.5.

[24] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651, Chapter 13.

Given the progress humans have made in so many activities, a failure to advance in the basic choice of war or peace seems incongruent. The twentieth-century novelist and philosopher, Arthur Koestler, has argued that this can be accounted for by an inherent evolutionary flaw. And this, in turn, stems from opposing features in the human brain which work against the survival of the race. His thesis is that something has 'snapped' inside the brain: it is no longer necessarily a function which will lead us to a better world, but something demonic, possessed, perhaps even evil.[25] Koestler's thesis has been dismissed by many as pseudo-scientific (and that may well be the case) but it is hard to deny that something intrinsic has driven people repeatedly to favour war.

Sometimes the urge to fight is short-lived and, in our more rational moments, we are likely to agree that war is not only harmful but futile. The trouble is that rationality is often overshadowed by irrational populism. Jingoism in the mid-nineteenth century became a popular term for patriotism, and verses like the following were chanted at public gatherings and sung heartily in pubs and music halls.

> We don't want to fight, but by jingo if we do
> We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too.[26]

Signing up to go and fight has, time and again, been seen as a proud moment for young men and their families. And, having conscripted, the new recruits, even before they are allocated their uniforms, would march through their home towns to frantic flag-waving and the sound of cheers. The sight of their return – smaller in number, many of them mutilated, with sombre expressions gazing into space – is altogether more salutary.

2025

The new year opens on a familiar theme with a round-up of conflicts around the world and declarations of peace. So what is new? Why is this different from what has happened in previous years? The list of past wars is long. To take just a few, more than four millennia ago the Akkadians fought the Amorites in northern Syria; in 1250 BCE, the Eastern Mediterranean hosted the famous Trojan War; and, in the middle of the following millennium, Carthaginian warriors engaged the Greek navy in a series of battles to gain control of Sicily. The birth of Christ, for all the religious expectation that followed, brought no change in this repetitive cycle, any more than did the arrival of Islam in the seventh century. Wars continued to wage – between religions as well as tribes and nations. And, all the time, weapons have become more sophisticated. The first use of war chariots can be dated to 2400 BCE in Mesopotamia. Ways of killing each other have come on apace since then, and often one side will no longer need to physically confront the other. In

[25] Arthur Koestler, *Janus: A summing up.* New York: Random House, 1978.
[26] Verse coined in the 1870s, at the time of Britain's involvement in the Russo-Turkish War.

modern warfare, extensive and effective use of drones reduces the very idea of person-to-person combat. So much change but nothing has really changed at all. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

This final section of a short article is hardly the place to explore what can be done to avert the threat of wars. Suffice to say that platitudes from religious and political leaders (including from international organizations like the UN) about how we all want peace are meaningless. Individual cases need to be treated according to their unique circumstances. And (as another article in this issue of the journal shows) everything should be done to negotiate non-violence before armed conflict occurs. Once the battlefield is reached and passions are released, it becomes more difficult if not impossible to separate the warring parties. In future articles about different points of conflict in the Indo-Pacific, this often under-represented aspect of peacemaking will be pursued.

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