

A WORLD WITHOUT WAR

John Cogley

War ceased to be a logical enterprise when it passed beyond the simple dimensions of aggression and defense. There was indeed a perverse logic in the actions of those who took up arms in order to seize what did not belong to them—the logic of the criminal; and certainly there was a logical basis for the reaction of those attacked when they decided to meet force with force and refused to give up what was rightfully theirs.

But as time went on and international politics became more complex, war began to be thought of as a way to decide which of two disputants had justice on his side. With that development, war lost its intrinsic logic, for war can never determine who is right; it can only determine who is stronger. Throughout history aggressors and scoundrels have walked off with war's victories, and even when the righteous have triumphed it has not been at all clear that they triumphed because they were righteous. The outcome of World War II, for instance, did not prove that Hitler was wrong and the Allies right, no more than a Nazi victory would have proved the opposite.

To say all this, however, is not to say that World War II was bereft of logic, because, like all idea-wars, once the fateful step was taken, the contest soon developed into an aggressor-and-defender war. Those who fought it do not, a decade and a half after it was brought to a close, feel that they acted irrationally. They tend, rather, to think of Nazism as an aggressive force that had to be stopped and see their role in the war not as armed ideologues meeting rival ideologues but as defenders of national integrity, property and human life resisting by force those who were on a rampage of destruction. Even the ideological Russians put their dogma aside for the duration and inspired the Red troops with thoughts of Holy Russia and the sanctity of the homeland. And American troops, thousands of miles from home, were told unceasingly that if Hitler triumphed, Akron and San Pedro, Brooklyn and Detroit would be in mortal danger. Moreover, they believed what they were told. They still do.

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And this general satisfaction that the U.S. did right to help win the second World War is one reason, I think, why contemporary pacifism has so little appeal for us. Despite the monstrous weapons of modern war, pacifism is less acceptable now than it was in the 1920's and '30's. I think this is due, in no little measure, to the fact that the very thought of a Hitler victory, all these years later, still suggests more horror than even the liveliest memory of the war's untold anguish can elicit.

It is no love of violence, then, that keeps even religious men out of the pacifist's camp; rather it is their recent experience with totalitarian evil and the conviction that, if gone unchecked, it could have resulted in even greater evil, in malice beyond our most perfervid imaginings, as indeed the sight of the piled-up bodies found in the concentration camps after the war exceeded the rhetoric of the most bellicose orator.

In a word, most of us are hopelessly convinced that pacifism provided no answers for our confrontation with the Nazi evil unleashed in September, 1939. We do not regret that we turned a deaf ear to the pacifist call then, and we have no greater confidence in its adequacy today.

This is not to say, of course, that the pacifists might not have been right then or that the evil involved in the crushing of Nazism might not actually weigh more heavily on the moral scale than the evil an unchecked Nazism would have led to. But most of us are not convinced of this and believe that the world, for all its present woes, is still better off than it would be if Nazism were not crushed.

But even those of us who question pacifist theory must now begin to think about pacifism—or at least must think about something that might easily be mistaken for pacifism though in truth it has no claim to that honorable name.

We must begin to think of living in a world without war. With the development of modern weapons, war has lost its last semblance of logic and there is no reason under the sun why mankind should ever again resort to it. In past wars men may have cried, "Give me liberty or give me death." What they meant was, "I am willing to die that those I am defending may live." But modern war means that the defended will die as surely as the defenders; it means that nothing will remain for the aggressors to grab. The idea-war, with the change in technology, must rest on its own logic; it can not take its impetus from the aggressor-and-defender war which it inevitably turned into, in the past. And the simple fact is this: there is no inherent logic in the idea-war—it simply makes no sense; it never did.

What we must begin to reckon with, then, is the idea that technology has succeeded in doing what all the wit and piety of the moralists through the ages failed to do: it has utterly eliminated the logic of war. When that fact really sinks in, war may disappear from the face of the earth.

The idea that war has lost its last claim to logic is sinking in, though the process, of course, is slow, maddeningly, dangerously slow. But at least men the world over are gradually digesting the crude facts of the situation: when the next war is finished there will be nothing for anybody to want. The notion of Victory no longer makes sense. There is only defeat, and as George Kennan recently reminded us, the real defeat is the war itself, for it involves a common fate which will be visited on all who have anything to do with it.

If this simple fact of life is not universally accepted now, it surely will be after the next war. The question facing us, then, is whether intelligence or *frightful experience* will set the clock. Will mankind make its decision about war before or after it has been conclusively, and tragically, demonstrated?

I hold that this is the actual state of affairs. Moreover, I claim that it is known to military leaders and heads of state the world over. Yet we and the Russians continue to build armaments ever more horrible. That does not make much sense, does it?

Yet I must admit that there is no more sensible way to proceed at the present time. Military disarmament is unthinkable until disarmament is politically possible, and it will not be politically possible until the facts of modern war are universally recognized and universally acted on. That at best will be a slow, gradual process.

It will indeed be precariously slow, so slow that one can sympathize with the proponents of "limited warfare," who, with more faith in human intelligence and in moral resolve than I can summon, want to restore the status quo ante as a product of decision rather than of scientific fact. One can also find understanding for those earnest advocates of nuclear "sanity," who sound to me like social workers running up and down the corridors of a mental hospital demanding order. But I see real dangers in both movements. The first want to delay mankind's decision about renouncing war; the second want to rush it. Rushing it may be the more precarious, for if the decision is prematurely recognized and acted on before it truly is the decision of mankind evil consequences of unimagined scope may result.

On a matter like this, mankind can neither be delayed nor rushed. It will act as it always does, slowly and gradually. There will be no day on which all

men will agree to find a substitute for war. But if tragedy can be averted in the meantime, the day will come when mankind will realize that it has found one.

Evil spawns evil and the substitute men find for war may have terrors for the world as horrible in their own way as those begotten of war. I can not tell you what they will be; I can only expect them. But in any case, even on that day when war is gone, I suspect that pacifism will still be a minority position.

If we try to rush that day, we may bring down upon ourselves the cataclysm we all fear, for while we are doomed to await a greater awareness of the technological facts of life and more determination among governments to recognize them, we must admit that only the arms balance can keep us out of war. But the longer we live with this precarious balance, as everyone knows, the more dangerous our situation—and the more possibility there is that a single false political move, an uncertain military gesture, even the much-discussed misreading of the radar screen, will set off World War III.

Because I believe all this is true, I have no answers to offer, and the answers of others usually strike me as either fatuous moralizing or wishful thinking. All I can say is that we must get used to living in the age of terror that we find ourselves in; at the same time we must learn to live in it as if the terror did not exist. Those who cry havoc do not serve us well, no more than those who cry peace, peace when there is no peace.

When George Kennan told students at the Princeton Theological Seminary that in the long run we have no choice but to throw ourselves on the mercy of God, he was not, as I understand him, crying out his despair, nor was he retreating into mysticism. On the contrary, I take it that his statement grew out of a recognition, based on a shrewd analysis of the present situation, that mankind might yet be saved, if through the mercy of God we are protected from fatal political folly, military stupidity and even such accidents as the misreading of the radar screen, until we realize that we were saved. From such dangers as these, however, we have nowhere to turn but to Heaven.

If we survive the dread possibilities that now hang over us and finally realize that war has been outmoded, the proximate cause of our salvation will surely be that same Science which planned our destruction; the ultimate Cause—men of faith may acknowledge—will be the God of History who, in a manner of speaking, has always seemed to have a special fondness for irony.