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Thinking about Peace Today

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Discussing peace—and how to get to and maintain situations, practices, and socio-political structures that build peace—is of the greatest urgency. But the first step, both psychologically and epistemologically, is overcoming preoccupation with war and resistance to thinking about peace. This article takes on these problems and lays essential groundwork for substantive discussion of peace. Attractions of war and myths of war are deconstructed, and negative views of humans' capacity for peaceful behavior are examined and rejected. Wide-ranging costs of war and war-preparedness are also exposed. The value of peace is then discussed. A concluding section offers a list of "home truths" (beliefs that invite universal assent), from which constructive reflection on peace might begin.

Key words: peace, peace-building, war, resistance, peaceful behavior

The Obstacle of War

Some of the best thinking about humans as social and political beings has been devoted to peace. But a far greater amount has undoubtedly been devoted to war. Indeed, war hovers, like some abstract entity, just beneath the surface of daily life and, tragically often enough, occupies the surface itself. Even

when war is not “hot” in some geographical area near you, it consumes many resources while biding its time and exercising its metaphorical presence—as in the sentence just phrased. War appears in everyday discourse not just as a metaphor but even as a model for conscientious action. Campaigns to improve the human lot, for example, are often characterized as: “war on poverty,” “war against climate change,” “war on hunger,” “war against HIV/AIDS,” “war on child abuse,” and so on. Over the past few years, the “war on terror” has been on the front page and the evening news more or less daily, and this ill-considered concept has licensed a spectrum of illegal and immoral behaviors, from systematic lying by elected leaders to the dark excesses of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, which are comparable to wartime crimes of the past (Cortright, 2008). Think you’ve heard it all? You haven’t. Surfing the crest of the war on terror wave, the Civil Aviation Authority of Australia now declares “war on error” (Marchbank, 2009), an educational “roadshow” aimed at reducing pilot mistakes.

War is free for the taking in lots of ways. Some say that in contrast, peace has to be “sold,” that there is a problem of “marketing peace” to those who know little and maybe think less about it, or else are just downright skeptical of the idea. Why should there be a problem of this kind? It seems absurd. But let’s accept the premise and see where we can go from there. Peace scholar David Cortright remarked that: “Throughout history the cause of peace has been on trial, standing like a forlorn defendant before the court of established opinion, misunderstood and maligned on all sides” (Cortright, 2008, p. 1). Cortright’s reflection suggests that the answer to the “why” question posed earlier can be framed as follows: Peace is an unfamiliar and poorly understood concept and reality. Perhaps it has been too seldom experienced—or in the case of some people, hardly tasted at all. Learned observers note that there have been fewer inter-state wars in recent times; that democracies do not go to war with one another; and that war as a useful extension of national policy and means of pursuing political objectives is a thing of the past. Perhaps so, but this does not prevent wars from occurring in abundance, and increasingly they are intra-state civil wars, guerrilla-led insurgencies, explosions of ethnic violence, criminal power-struggles, and

proxy wars. However, as war historian Jeremy Black cautioned,

It is possible that low-intensity warfare will be that which is most common in the future, but, equally, across much of the world there is no effective restraint on the ambitions and activities of states, and the continued combination of issues over which to dispute, and bellicose leaderships, may lead to serious levels of warfare between regular forces. (Black, 1998, p. 235)

Since war is such a familiar part of human life, past and present, and peace, by contrast, occupies the shadows, it follows that in order to think about peace, we first have to get past thinking about war. This requires us to move beyond some pretty formidable and influential ideas. These are, for example: that war brings out the best qualities in men; that it is a “manly art”; that it makes men out of boys; that a nation comes of age through armed conflict, its defining moment being some famous battle or a particular war; that the most honorable way in which one can serve one’s country (or group) is by shedding blood for it. Such ideas have not served humanity well—rather, just the opposite. They have led us blindly into more and more wars, genocides, arms races, and ultimately, to the constant state of war-readiness we find ourselves in today—a kind of unending war, as some observers have called the situation. Wars have cost our species and the planet hugely both in terms of their casualties and other consequences and the resources consumed by war-preparedness. What is it all for? Are we stuck forever within cultures of violence? Do we lack the intelligence, will, moral fiber, and sense of world community to find better ways of conducting our affairs? Is it in our genes to be warriors? Is there something specifically wrong with how males are constituted or socialized that leads to war? Are there forces in history with their own irresistible momentum that bring about periodic clashes? Or, on the other hand, are there perhaps many valuable templates already in existence for building relationships, negotiation strategies, trust, and modes of behaving that can provide alternatives to war and even terrorism? As Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd pondered in 2008, on the ninetieth anniversary of Armistice Day, “...is war our permanent condition? Must every generation go through

war to be reminded why there should be no war? Or can we dare to do something different, can we dare to think something different?" (Rudd, 2008). The questions pile up like the dead and maimed that humans continue to produce in warfare.

Many have raised these questions and more, wondering whether humans are fatefully warlike and locked into perennial cycles of mortal combat. To be sure, no one can claim to have complete answers to the deep questions about war because abundant areas of uncertainty still persist in our knowledge about our own species. Even if we could gather together all of the world's psychologists and psychiatrists, it is unlikely they could explain everything we need to know in order to create a world free from war and violent conflict. But we can try to move forward with the insights we've achieved and the tools we have for understanding and promoting the factors that make peace possible, with the aim of stimulating new and different thought and feeling processes that may promise better choices than those made in the past.

War Myths

In keeping with the commitment to examine and move beyond barriers that block thinking about peace, it will be useful to expose some myths. Of course myths alone do not explain war. A monocausal account could never do justice to the complexities of war, and no attempt will be made here to provide a comprehensive explanation of why wars occur. This would be an entirely different and far more ambitious project. But, whatever else might be said about war, it lives in the domain of myth, and this applies both to the factors that help bring it about and to those that create and sustain ideas such as that of the "demonic enemy." As psychologist Lawrence LeShan pointed out, war brings about a shift from the normal or "sensory mode" of perceiving reality to a "mythic mode" (LeShan, 1992) with a logic of its own. Journalist Chris Hedges, who has reported on-the-scene from numerous wars, explained this "logic":

The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage, it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for

living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent. ... And war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble. And those who have the least meaning in their lives ... are all susceptible to war's appeal. (Hedges, 2003, pp. 3-4)

Looking back at his own experience of war's addictive allure, Hedges added: "The chance to exist for an intense and overpowering moment, even if it meant certain oblivion, seemed worth it in the midst of war—and very stupid once the war ended" (Hedges, 2003, p. 5).

War also thrives on symbolism and imaginative associations, and it has been remarked, in this vein, that: "Wars commence in our culture first of all, and we kill each other in euphemisms and abstractions long before the first ... missiles have been launched. ... The deformed human mind is the ultimate doomsday weapon ..." (Thompson, as cited in Zwicker, 1983, p. 7).

It is partly these myths and subconscious connections to which Black referred when he observed that in studying wars, past or present, "Rather than focusing on individual conflicts, it is more important to understand the values that made compromise unacceptable, force appear necessary and even desirable, and war seem crucial to identity and self-respect" (Black, 1998, p. 242).

According to the first and most prominent myth about war the history of humankind is equivalent to the story of great deeds done by famous rulers and leaders (mostly men) and the wars they have prepared for and fought. Peace, viewed from this standpoint, consists of the dull, uneventful periods in between wars that are unworthy of investigation. Aside from begging questions about the nature of peace, peace as a desirable goal, and avenues by which to reach a peaceful world, this outlook neglects the positive phenomenon of peaceful everyday interactions that predominate among humans (Fry, 2007; Tomasello, 2009), as well as the perspective that history cannot be written without reference to the actions and ways of life of average people throughout the ages.

Second, there is the myth that wars solve human problems and advance interests more effectively than other kinds of

engagements. The fact that wars are recurrent should by itself show that (with a very few, debatable exceptions) they do not solve problems, or at best, do so only temporarily and partially, while sowing the seeds for nationalism, inter-group hatred, revenge-seeking, defective political arrangements and boundaries, and therefore, for future conflict. At the end of the day communication, respectful coexistence, and sometimes even forgiveness and reconciliation, are the only ways to bury hostilities with finality. As one social scientist observed, "What all wars have in common is the unmistakable moral lesson that homicide is an acceptable, even praiseworthy, means to certain ends" (MacNair, 2003, p. 51). But following this go-nowhere teaching can only yield negative feedback: aggression begets more aggression, violence, more violence, and war, more war, if they remain unchecked by negotiation and nonviolent resolution. Surely bitter experience has taught us that there is no "war to end war"—or has it?

A third, associated myth is that wars—or "military actions" that perpetrators seek not to have thought of as wars, invasions, or acts of aggression—are undertaken (always) in defense of shared ideals and a cherished way of life. On the contrary, historical examples show that in warfare, economic, class, and other factors are often front-and-center, and that private political aspirations, the jingoism of particular interest groups, and various ideological factors are rife. While it is simplistic and one-dimensional to argue that in all wars the poor and disadvantaged serve the interests of the rich and powerful, a stark slogan from the First World War—"A bayonet is a weapon with a worker on both ends"—makes us wonder whether this perspective embodies a significant grain of truth. Widespread opposition to, and public demonstrations against, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, both in America and abroad, also bring into focus the question of whose values, interests, and political judgments were driving these conflicts.

The preceding paragraph may put one in mind of a fourth myth, expressed in the belief that traditional notions of a just war can still be defended today. While just war theory has a long and distinguished career, to be sure, in the age of aerial bombardment, and nuclear and other contemporary weapons, killing has become actually and potentially more

indiscriminate, making the concept of “just war” highly tenuous. And because, as mentioned previously, warfare not only promotes actions that would be considered clearly immoral in any other context, and frequently serves vested interests of one kind or another, it may turn out that just war theory will itself become either a casualty of philosophical critiques (Francis, 2004) or at least an extremely restricted category for rationalizing armed conflict (Lucas, 2007).

Fifth, there is the myth that human nature is inherently aggressive and warlike. A widely-held theory claims that war “has played an integral role in our evolution.” Specifically, “[t]he theory ... suggests the cooperative skills we’ve had to develop to be effective warriors have turned into the modern ability to work towards a common goal” (Holmes, 2008, p. 8). Some might infer that such a view is perhaps merely another vaguely disguised glorification of war, a coopting of our peaceful instincts by a view about our inborn (biologically determined) aggressiveness. However, it would be facile to draw these conclusions, given that the theory stems from research findings in a number of fields that tend toward a consensus. More importantly, the outlook under consideration tells us that although cooperative tendencies evolved from warlike ones, they have taken on a life of their own and thus play a real, independent role in human affairs. Looking at the theory in this way helps us avoid endorsing the fallacious belief that how things once were tells us how they will be, ought to be, or even must be. What has occurred or might have occurred during the ancient (and not so ancient) past life of our species is a very unreliable and not necessarily desirable guide to how things might or should be, either now or in the future. The premise for the statement just made is that humans are capable of choice, rational reflection and analysis, and hence also of change. Unless one accepts some form of rigid determinism, no biological or anthropological account can provide everything we require in order to understand the past or plan for the future. Not only this, but humans are showing every sign of being able to control their own future evolution. (“Being able” does not, of course, entail that we are yet willing to take on the task in a responsible manner, and to use this potential wisely.) While some aspects of human nature may be relatively

constant, our species is noteworthy for having reinvented itself many times over. As recent brain research on “neuroplasticity” keeps demonstrating, humans are not so “hard-wired” into stereotypical patterns of thinking and response as many suppose (Doidge, 2007; Eliot, 2009).

A century ago, William James, psychologist, philosopher, confirmed pacifist, and proponent of the idea that humanity exists in a state of unending war, confidently proclaimed—as if it were a truism needing no argumentative or empirical support: “Our ancestors have bred pugnacity into our bone and marrow, and thousands of years of peace won’t breed it out of us” (James, 1987/1910, p. 1283). But as we’ve seen, this view is now being challenged on both historical and scientific grounds. And if recently proposed revisions to Darwinian theory prevail, the previously scorned idea that “environment can alter heredity” may eventually take hold (Burkeman, 2010), opening up new possibilities for changing human behavior for the better—if we so choose.

We can now begin to see more clearly that evolutionary traits revealed in the human past do not license inferences about the inevitability of war and other forms of violent conflict in the future. The claim that “war is in our genes,” therefore, should be rejected. Leaving aside possible supplements to the theory of natural selection, a growing body of empirical research tends toward the conclusion that, even if humans’ evolution into peaceful beings is not guaranteed, it’s equally evident that war cannot simply be rationalized as a kind of “biological compulsion” (Horgan, 2009). Furthermore, inasmuch as belief in the inevitability of something tends to make that thing inevitable (a self-fulfilling prophecy), we need to be on guard against any such belief, for it negates humans’ decision-making capacity and consequently the ability to change the course of events in which they are involved. Immanuel Kant, the brilliant Enlightenment philosopher, entertained the theory that:

war itself requires no particular motivation, but appears to be ingrained in human nature and is even valued as something noble; indeed, the desire for glory inspires men to it, even independently of selfish motives.

Consequently, *courage in war* (among American Indians as well as during Europe's chivalric period) is judged to be of immediate and great worth not only *during war* (as is reasonable), but also in order that *war might be*, and often war is begun only as a means to display courage. As a result, an intrinsic worth is bestowed on war, even to the extent that philosophers, unmindful of that Greek saying, 'War is a bad bet because it produces more evil people than it eliminates,' have praised it as having a certain ennobling influence on mankind. (Kant, 1983/1795, p. 123; emphasis original)

This is a very perceptive and interesting blend of two views: the belief that humans are innately warlike and the idea that war has the magic transformative power to actualize the finest aspects of human nature. Kant concedes a certain amount of truth to both views, but it is of much greater importance to notice that the context in which he discusses them—his famous essay on "perpetual peace"—builds a strong argument on behalf of a rational arrangement of mutual interest by which nations can abolish war.

We needn't be frightened, then, of the theory that war has developed cooperative skills in our own (and closely related) species. Let us assume that war *has* done so, rather than struggle resignedly against admitting the possibility. Many other activities have also undoubtedly co-developed these same skills. And the conclusion we ought, therefore, to reach is that maybe the route we have followed to this end is in some ways unfortunate, but the cooperative skills now exist and can be used and developed further in new settings. In this respect, as in many others, the future doesn't have to resemble the past, with ourselves as mere passive and despairing onlookers. It can, on the contrary, be consciously, conscientiously fashioned by us, and this gives grounds for hope that we will do so.

Looking again at Kant's comments, we can see that they confirm the claim (also found in the observations by Hedges cited in the previous section) that war produces a strong sense of common purpose and solidarity. This assertion should not be dismissed lightly. It was acknowledgment of this fact that motivated James to introduce the important idea of a

“moral equivalent of war” (James, 1987/1910), that is, some participatory activity or activities that are capable of yielding the same beneficial outcomes for humanity as war does. While James’ and Kant’s accounts expressed the masculinist bias of their times, they nevertheless made an important point, and ongoing research is providing evidence about alternative activities that produce the rewards and emotional outlets often attributed to war (MacNair, 2003). But in the end, the question remains whether, for the vast majority of humans of both sexes (the dead, injured, maimed, and all noncombatants), this is the most relevant issue. Furthermore, given the fragile state of the world today and the costs of war, one group of psychologists remarked that “peace cannot wait until all the data are in” (Winter, Christie, Wagner, & Boston, 2001).

Another perspective that tends to foster pessimism about our species’ warlike nature is Freud’s theory of the “death instinct.” With an intellectual lineage deriving from Empedocles in ancient Greece, this formulation first appeared in Freud’s (1920) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and was developed in several subsequent works. Most of Freud’s early students and followers rejected the theory, with the notable exception of Melanie Klein, but renewed interest in it has been stimulated by French psychoanalysts Jacques Lacan and Jean Laplanche. Philosopher Richard Boothby, an expert on Lacan, argued that the death instinct is “the darkest and most stubborn riddle posed by the legacy of psychoanalysis” (Boothby, 1991, p. 1).

In “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” Freud (1964/1937) argued that there are “unmistakable indications of the presence of a power in mental life which we call the instinct of aggression or of destruction according to its aims, and which we trace back to the original death instinct of living matter” (p. 243). The death instinct entered the scene primarily to explain neurosis, masochism, certain kinds of dreams, and other phenomena as surrogate forms of self-punishment or self-eradication, and human psychic life came to be understood as the site of a struggle between “Eros” (the life instinct) and “Thanatos” (the death instinct). Eros includes impulses that “seek to preserve and unite,” and the death instinct those that are motivated by hatred and “seek to destroy and kill.” Yet Freud insisted that each is equally “essential” to our makeup (Freud, 1964/1933, p. 209).

Which tendency will triumph? Freud eventually postulated that the death drive threatens to overwhelm the life drive in each of us (rather than the reverse, or some state of equilibrium being reached). Against this background, he saw civilization as the somewhat precarious process whereby humans learn to sacrifice raw expression of instinctual drives in favor of stability, sociability, and the rule of law. Instinctual energies are channelled into other avenues of endeavor, and although social disintegration and war are constant disruptive tendencies within the human condition, Freud paradoxically envisioned the possibility that we all may even become pacifists one day (Freud, 1964/1933).

Freud's death instinct has not gained much traction in psychoanalysis and the social sciences, but it certainly appears to have passed into the everyday and literary imaginations as a way of capturing our predicament, and references to a "collective death wish" are not uncommon in popular culture. This is entirely understandable in view of the persistence of warfare and violence as means of settling disputes and conflicts of various kinds, dealing with offences and exacting revenge, nefarious strategies for advancing interests, and the like; the manufacture and proliferation of high-tech weapons and weapons of mass destruction; and the burgeoning of cultural products concerned with death, destruction, torture, the symbolism of death and aggression, and so on. One might likewise be forgiven for pondering a collective death wish given the neglectful behavior of human beings toward their own kind, and our abuse of other species, the environment, and the planet as a whole.

Whether the idea of a universal death instinct in humans belongs within the realm of fact or fantasy, I shall not judge here. However, as even Freud himself realized, we must resist entrapment by its deterministic tone; we can only act meaningfully when we choose our own destiny as a species, and this entails addressing and taking charge of both the best and the worst in us. Once again, this insight beckons us toward the study of peace as an alternative pathway.

The Costs of War

The devastating effects of war in the modern world need little elaboration, nor does the non-productivity of aggressive

violence on the individual and group levels. But it may help to place the present investigation of peace in perspective if we confront a few facts and figures. To start with, as Cortright (2008) correctly argued, "the permanent mobilization for war that emerged in the wake of World War II reinforced the predisposition of political leaders to use military force and created greater institutional capacities to intervene in the affairs of other countries" (p. 155). Superpowers and other major powers among nations have followed this route numerous times in the postwar decades, because adherence to militarized policy has "devalued diplomatic approaches" (Cortright, 2008, p. 123).

War-preparedness is very costly and it inspires the mindset that: "we've paid for all this stuff, so we'd better use it" (to justify the cost to taxpayers and legislators); or: "we might as well use it" (because it can be used, needs to be tried out, and so on). During the Cold War, there was also the motivation to "use it or lose it," exacerbated by fears of a nuclear first strike. This arguably caused much of the stress and social anxiety of that era, for leaders and citizenry alike, although fortunately the ultimate weapons were never deployed.

Annual global military expenditures in 2009 were reliably estimated by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute at 1.53 trillion U.S. dollars. This represents a six percent increase in real terms over the previous year and a forty-nine percent increase since 2000. Nearly half of the world total is accounted for by the American defense budget. In contrast, the entire budget of the United Nations is a pitiful 1.8 percent of the world military expense total (Shah, 2010b). This is the "big picture" cost of war-preparedness. Meanwhile, the gross disparity between the world's rich and poor continues, and is appalling by any measure. Peace and development activist and author Vijay Mehta observed that: "This emphasis on militarism stands in sharp contrast to the social deficit of humanity. Almost half the world's people live in abject poverty" (Mehta, 2006, p. 1). It is easily concluded that diversion of a substantial portion of the massive military costs borne by nations today into solving global problems of living by means other than the use of deadly force and threats is money better spent on finding solutions to our common security issues. With specific reference to the United States, the National Priorities

Project, an Internet resource, invites viewers to see how tax dollars spent on defense (including weapons development) could alternatively be allocated to socially beneficial programs, nationally, by state, by congressional district, and by city, town, or county (National Priorities Project, n.d.).

There is also the “big picture” cost of actual warfare. As can readily be seen, this cost is wholly disproportionate to the investment in human well-being that good sense would prescribe, and opens up a seemingly all-consuming, bottomless pit of financial burden. The U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have had 1.26 trillion dollars allocated to them in the period up to March 4, 2011 by the U.S. federal government (National Priorities Project, n.d.). This unfathomable sum does not include: costs to other countries participating in the Coalition; costs borne by individual taxpayers, servicemen and women and their families; loss of government services traded off against military expenditures; and future costs such as medical care for veterans and interest on the national debt incurred by deficit financing (National Priorities Project, n.d.). Nor, of course, does it include all the many costs to the Iraqi and Afghan peoples; to neighboring countries that have had to deal with refugees and other spillover effects; and the collateral damage that is intangible, difficult to verify or quantify, and far-reaching, such as increased hatred and anger toward the U.S. and its allies, the use of Iraq as a terrorist training arena, assaults on civil liberties and international law, fanning the flames of other conflicts, aggravation of personal risk in international travel, and so on. It is typical of warfare to have a large range of costs (including unintended ones) and “invisible,” intangible effects that unroll for decades afterwards (Tyner, 2010).

One of these “invisible” or little reported, little considered effects is that on women and children, who traditionally bear many of the costs of war. An example comes from the civil war that has torn apart the Democratic Republic of Congo since August 1998. Although “the world’s deadliest conflict since World War II,” as one observer put it (Shah, 2010a, p. 1), this horrible war is “forgotten” by most of us, notwithstanding the involvement of seven countries, and a toll to date of 5.4 million dead and 1.5 million people internally displaced or made

refugees. While children comprise nineteen percent of the population, they represent forty-seven percent of the fatalities (Beaumont, 2010; Shah, 2010a). In addition, “thousands upon thousands of women, girls and children ... suffer brutal sexual violence, which is the worst in the world, the UN says” (Rice, 2008, p. 19). Rape is one of the most universal and egregious forms of human rights violation during periods of armed conflict, women and children having always been regarded as among the spoils of war and as instruments for humiliating the enemy (Jones, 2010).

A second example concerns Israel’s invasion of Gaza that began in late December 2008. In this operation over 1,400 people were killed, a large majority of whom were noncombatants, and more than 5,300 were injured. In excess of 5,000 homes were destroyed or severely damaged, another 16,000 “moderately damaged,” and subsequent importation of essentials “has been insufficient to meet the needs of the 1.5 million people trapped inside the Gaza Strip” (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 2009, p. 13). Estimates of total damage range up to two billion U.S. dollars and above. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently stated:

In particular, the Committee is deeply disturbed by the psychological effects on children in Gaza resulting from [Israel’s 2008-09] Operation ‘Cast Lead’ and the lack of assistance for these children. The Committee is furthermore concerned over the lack of adequate programmes for rehabilitation of children who have been victims of anti-personnel mines. (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2010, point 37)

A more general finding is that: “Among the consequences of war, the impact on the mental health of the civilian population is one of the most significant” (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2005, p. 25) with children, not surprisingly, standing out as especially vulnerable.

Another background effect of war—collateral damage to victor and vanquished alike—is the lingering impact upon veterans. Up to twenty percent of service personnel returning from present wars in Afghanistan and Iraq suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but even more alarming

is the fact that nearly sixty percent of those treated at veterans' hospitals are veterans of a war that ended over four decades ago. "Even as Vietnam veterans now enter their 60s and begin to die off," it is reported, "the number seeking P.T.S.D. treatment is growing" (Winerip, 2009, p. 2). Leaving aside the monetary cost of veterans' payouts of all kinds (around 44.7 billion dollars in 2009), one can easily see that a terrible price is being paid by those who fought and still fight these wars.

A final example of the easily ignored or overlooked effects of war is its environmental impact. According to geographer Joni Seager, "Military is the world's biggest environmental vandals, whether at war or in peace. ... [T]he environmental costs of militarized peace bear suspicious resemblance to the costs of war" (Seager, 1995, p. xi). But beyond generalities, consider briefly the Gulf War (1990-91). Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces deliberately "dumped approximately one million tons of crude oil [from Kuwait] into the Persian Gulf"; and "Crude oil was also spilled into the desert, forming oil lakes covering 50 square kilometers. In due time the oil percolated into underground aquifers" (Enzler, 2006, p. 1). The effects on wildlife, sea-dwelling food sources, and human health were predictably vast. Meanwhile, Coalition air attacks on Iraqi installations released quantities of nerve gas into the Tigris River, and "Soon after the ceasefire was signed, U.N. observers declared this salient river dead" (Thomas, 1995, p. 123). At the time, it was reported that bombing campaigns in Iraq "consume 12 million gallons of fuel a day," and that the amount of bombs dropped on Iraq and Kuwait "is generally believed to exceed what was used in all of World War II" (Kifner, 1991, p. 1). In addition to obvious military targets, "Croplands, barns and grain silos were ... attacked, along with irrigation floodgates that caused vast incursions of seawater into southern Iraq, killing crops and permanently salting farmland" (Thomas, 1995, p. 124). A group of scientific researchers, in the conclusion of their article, noted simply that "The Iraqi occupation and the subsequent armed conflict devastated the terrestrial environment of Kuwait" (Omar, Briskey, Misak, & Asem, 2000, p. 336).

The preceding account provides only a minute slice of the actual or suspected environmental damage resulting from this war. Recovery and rehabilitation of regional ecosystems have

been long-term processes and some good outcomes have been claimed (Omar, et al., 2000; Brauer, 2009). In the larger context, there are ongoing discussions in the literature aimed at defining accountability for ecological damage in wartime and developing guidelines that will help limit negative environmental consequences in military operations (Austin & Bruch, 2000; Brauer, 2009). It is important to observe here that the issue is not whom we should blame for starting a particular conflict; who did the most damage; whether recovery and rehabilitation are viable after technologically advanced warfare; or whether national policies to restrict environmental destruction in wartime can be framed (in the spirit of just-war doctrine). The point is that war and a healthy planet are incompatible states of affairs.

Ron Paul, a Texas Republican congressman, physician, and U.S. Air Force veteran, has written that: "The cost of war is always more than anticipated. If all the costs were known prior to the beginning of a war, fewer wars would be fought" (Paul, 2005, p. 1). This assessment may be too optimistic, as it assumes a level of rationality tragically often bracketed out of the equation that leads to war-making. Nevertheless, Paul's conclusion that: "Most wars could be avoided with better diplomacy, a mutual understanding of minding one's own business, and respect for the right of self-determination" (p. 1) shines forth as a truth we would all do well to memorize and implement.

Why We Need Peace

Given the level of violence in the world today, as well as the waste of resources and human potential that war and preparations for war represent, there is an acute need for peace everywhere. War and preparations for war are bad for all living things—socially, economically, environmentally, and in terms of survival and basic well-being. To say that war is bad for us is one thing; to say that peace is good for us is another. Some, but not all, will regard the latter, as much as the former, as obviously true. I hope this essay will have shown it to be so. Nothing can be lost, however, and much is to be gained, by briefly reviewing why we need peace.

One way to pursue this goal is to invoke the perspectives of “negative peace” and “positive peace,” as they are commonly called. My argument is that we can readily discern the benefits of peace under both of these headings. Negative peace refers to the absence of war and violent hostilities. This includes or may include the cessation of armed conflict, the ending of territorial occupation, the withdrawal and decommissioning of armaments and armed forces, arms limitation treaties, amnesties, and the like. Negative peace offers relief or freedom from war, which is an essential prerequisite for the resumption and continuation of everyday life. Clearly, negative peace, if maintained, offers the benefits of security, repatriation, rebuilding, and reconciliation. It doesn’t take peace scholars, though, to make people realize that this is only part of the story, and this is where positive peace comes into the picture.

Positive peace signifies the domain of options afforded by negative peace and what can be accomplished therein. We may call this “real peace” because it embraces all the processes and projects out of which a better world can emerge. Perhaps it will be objected that to speak of a peaceful world as a better world begs the question whether peace is a preferable state of affairs. Against this, however, it must be observed that peace offers many benefits that war and preparation for war grossly stunt or eliminate, and that rational choice would clearly seem to favor. Examples are: replacement of tension-driven rhetoric by less alienating and more constructive forms of discourse; greater scope for developing healthy, cooperative relations among nations and peoples; the chance to improve national infrastructures, education and other human resources; the prospect of dismantling forms of structural violence (such as poverty, hunger and political repression) with greater energy and the redirection of effort to matters of equality and equal opportunity; the chance to focus more carefully on environmental issues and even to exploit the potential for evolving international environmental cooperation as a means to build sustainable global peace; the opening up of space for personal transformation (so-called “inner peace”); and in general, the encouragement to think about alternative ways of coexisting that have not been thought of or tried out before. Peace is not an easy path, for very entrenched psychological traits and habits stand in the way, but the rewards are worth the effort.

The Appeal of Peace

Historian Michael Howard wrote: "Peace may or may not be 'a modern invention' but it is certainly a far more complex affair than war" (Howard, 2000, pp. 1-2). If so, then it may be that peace needs to be "sold" after all, if only in the sense that informing ourselves concerning what peace is and might be all about is the first step toward achieving a peaceful world. In keeping with this objective, I close with a series of observations labelled "home truths," which I hope will reinforce the reflections on why we need peace offered in the previous section. Specifically, these statements are intended to be expressions of common sense that invite a more detailed consideration of peace by each of us.

Home Truths

- All members of our species (not to mention other species) have a common interest in survival.
- Humans have survived evolution thus far because of their social skills (including caring and nurturing behavior) as well as communication skills, rather than because of their aggressive and violent tendencies.
- Security (a sense of safety and a positive quality of life) is a common interest of all human beings. Nationally, security signifies territorial integrity, the preservation and flourishing of certain values and ways of life, as well as self-sufficiency in defensive strategies and economic, energy, and resource matters. At the personal level, security embraces a safe and healthy natural and social environment, well-being, a decent standard of living, meaningful employment, adequate housing, freedom of expression, participation in decision-making processes that affect one's life, and for children, being loved, looked after, and educated.
- In a rapidly changing, "globalized" world, the vulnerability of every individual, group, and nation is increasingly apparent. Given that security (on various levels) is desirable, reducing levels of vulnerability becomes a paramount goal.
- If we (no matter whom the word "we" designates) have basic security needs, then it is fair to assume that this is also true of everyone else (every other "we," whether a loose collection of individuals, an identifiable

group, or a nation). In a global community, such as the one that exists today, security cannot be unilaterally or militarily assured; it must be a project of reciprocity.

- It is better (easier in practice, and more effective, economical, and conducive to mutual security and well-being) to realize one's interests and achieve one's goals by nonviolent rather than by violent means. It is better to avoid or prevent violent conflict than to manage or resolve it after the fact, just as it is better to prevent any kind of damage than to repair it.

- True security entails attempting to remove or reduce the causes of war and violent conflict, many of which are well-known or obvious, even if not equally well understood. Foreexample: poverty; historical inequalities and injustices; colonialism; lack of access to resources; abuse of power; unfair trade practices; unsustainable development; unethical exploitation of markets and foreign economies; violation and undermining of international law; lack of trust; aggressive foreign relations; proliferation of weaponry; inability to see beyond narrow self-interest or national interest; and lack of cooperation in defining and solving common problems.

- Armed conflict cannot continue indefinitely without destroying that for which we are fighting. In the end, it must give way to communication and learning how to coexist. Focusing on the latter processes instead of the former is less painful all around and offers greater positive benefits to all concerned.

- Notwithstanding what we constantly imbibe from the media, everyday human life is largely based on peaceful transactions, which, in normal circumstances, we build upon, either instinctively or deliberately.

Pondering the above statements and others like them might just help clear a space within which a constructive conversation about peace can occur—one that invites all interested persons to become involved therein. Either we will end war and preparations for war or they will end us. Ending them, therefore, is not just a choice, it is also an imperative. Discussion of what peace is, or could be, and of how we can obtain it must therefore be kept at the forefront of public dialogue and discussions of social welfare.

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