

# THE END OF WAR: TRUTH OR FICTION?

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**A**ntony Ou in response to Dr Jean-Paul Gagnon's article 'The End of War?' in *Political Reflection*, 2 (4): 30-33.

In Volume 2 Issue 4 of *Political Reflection*, Dr Jean-Paul Gagnon wrote a mind-provoking feature article on whether there will be the end of war in the near future. Therein he contended that cosmopolitanism is a possible moral force for global citizens to check any kind of power abuse by their governments, private industries, and themselves. It will be a spreading trend of improving the quality of democracy across the world, at sub-national, national and international levels. Wars, therefore, are constantly checked and condemned by global citizens. The two World Wars, the wars in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were atrocities that cannot be compared with wars nowadays such as the wars in Iraq, Libya, and the Falkland Islands, in terms of scale and brutality. This conversation, due to space restrictions, did not look to ethnic cleansing or genocide as these differ to "conventional war" (see Michael Mann's separation of

war and ethnic cleansing in *The Dark Side of Democracy*). Gagnon argues that the global citizenry "will keep us firmly away from the total wars and blitzkriegs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. War, as it was once known, is thankfully dead - war is dead."

As a modern just war theory supporter, Antony Ou agrees with the moral stance of Gagnon. There is something to be said that the global citizenry is a powerful and convincing moral force when arguing about wars. However, when moral theories encounter Realpolitik, the former is silenced. Too often, human beings build their mistakes on already erroneous and shaken platforms. The greed for power and the intensity of hatred prevail. Wars have not been stopped in many parts of the world; weapons are deadlier; and national sentiments of hatred towards "outside" enemies are increasingly evident. Ou's question remains: Is the notion "war is dead" a realistic goal, or is it a fiction invented by moral philosophers?

In the following dialogue, Ou will ask for the clarification of concepts, and more



importantly, the plausibility of implementing the “unfinished project” of the global citizenry. Gagnon provides his responses to these questions. This dialectic approach traces back to the times of Plato and Confucius. The purpose of these dialectics is nothing more than to attract and open up further dialogues and debates on the nature and possibility of ending one of the most devastating human inventions: war.

**Antony Ou:** You have attempted to distinguish between traditional war and new kinds of wars in the post-Cold War era. The former is unchecked by citizens around the world for their use of unlimited violence, such as the two World Wars. The latter, on the other hand, does not share “the massive scale brutality of total war”. Instead, new potential wars are increasingly checked by mass media, citizens and intellectuals throughout the world. Therefore, by arguing new wars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are limited by the moral force of the global citizenry, you reason that the old kind of war is dead. You pronounce “it is a cautious statement of hope, of trying to establish definitive change in the way humans conduct violence to each other, and is a foray into the possibilities of global citizenship.”

However, I would like to make a counter-proposition: that war can hardly end as long as political and economic interests are at stake among nation states, triggered by greed and lust for more power. Sometimes the process is catalysed by wrong calculation and irrationality. As you have argued, your work is not “predictive” but “a statement of hope”. But for how long can such “wishful thinking” be possibly realised?

Total wars among superpowers might be gone in these now two decades of post-Cold War politics. However, traditional brutal wars continue to exist in different parts of Africa and the Middle East, as you have rightly pointed out in your essay. In the name of war on terror and international security, the “American Imperialist” has successfully overthrown the Taliban regime and Saddam Hussein. Such military actions and regime changes were not invented by George W. Bush, but it has been “an integral part of US foreign policy for more than one hundred years.” How can we be sure by the mere increase of awareness of the global citizenry that the American foreign policy of regime change can be morally and practically unjustified in the near future? How can we be sure the majority of “global citizens” who are uneducated citizens but easily manipulated by national sentiments, suddenly or gradually become liberal-democratic-moral crusaders who condemn unjust wars in other foreign countries? In other words, I strongly doubt that wars, both brutal and less brutal ones, will become extinct in the future. The question mark of the essay title “The End of War” might rightly symbolise all of my doubts.

**Jean-Paul Gagnon:** There is a lot in that so I will try to address your points in order. First, your counter-proposition: contest, difference, and oppositions will I think be with humans and their constructs for as long as we occupy this evolved form of flesh and being. And I think contest, difference and opposition is important. But, there are ways of understanding the aforementioned and approaching them through agonism – not antagonism. We must work through peace and not violence. This is a concept very well captured by Chantal Mouffe and



Ernesto Laclau's 'friendly-enemies' which was elaborated upon by Ed Wingenbach (*Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy*) and William E Connolly among others.

To embody and action this agonism in the affairs of states, nations, associations, and individuals throughout the world will take education, practice, and time. This addresses your other points on how the global collection of demoi, often uneducated about agonism and its expectations, can live up to the desires set out in my article. I think many in this world, although possibly not knowing the

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word agonism, understand the need and value of peace. And there are certainly significant and growing majority opinions in many states across this world – held by individuals – that any imperialism, not just the one spurred on by the frightening US war-machine, is wrong. This relates to the point I tried to make in “Global Leviathan Rising” that there are the beginnings of what I hope will become a very impressive global democracy society, a Leviathan of democracy, that will be able to resist even the most dastardly imperial state. I spoke at some length about this with Noam Chomsky – his opinion will be published in my forthcoming book *Thinkers in Conversation*.

**Antony Ou:** One might argue that we are now living in the post-Cold War era, where people celebrate the triumph of the market instead of having wars against

their real or imagined enemies. However, the Cold War mind-set has not perished as you have also pointed out in the footnote of your essay. Instead, chauvinistic comments and national sentiments are so obvious in the media of heavyweights like Greater China, India and Russia. People are deeply internalized by the belief that there are always external threats— the external Others that would jeopardize their national security and prosperity. There might not be clear-cut evidence showing that there are arm races among states, but there are new weapon collections in arsenals of these superpowers in the name of national security. For instance, mainland China has been increasing its expenses on its navy over the past few years because of the South China Sea controversy. The recent controversy of Diaoyu Island/Senkaku Islands between China and Japan has triggered hatred and heated discussions of war between the two states. India's Agni-5 was launched successfully in April this year, blessed by the Prime Minister, saying that it was a milestone of India's for growing to becoming one of the superpowers. In these senses, I doubt the “traditional” kind of wars would disappear, at least in the near future. My question is: Will superpowers that survived and developed after the Cold War (like mainland China, India and Russia) become sources of “traditional wars” in the near future? By glorifying the national pasts and their “modern scientific development”, can these peoples be genuinely convinced and undergo a “paradigm shift” by adopting the ideas of global citizenry?

**Jean-Paul Gagnon:** First, I don't think we have enough understanding of what the billions of individuals in this world think, 

fear, or wish for. I'm not convinced that the dominant outlook of these individuals is as you presented above. That being said, I make no claims that the outlook I am advocating is any clearer or better documented. In sociology, social theory, economics theory, and political philosophy, there is a lot to be said about the globalisation of citizenship and the transnational, international, and subnational pushes, jolts, or sometimes sustained democratization efforts happening in many diverse places. I think we might simply be reading different literature – to offer anything beyond a superficial answer I would have to conduct extensive analyses. But to give my abductive inclination – I think contemporary real-politik is also much more focused on soft-power. This is especially so in regards to Beijing policy: the PRC has built a reputation and continues to try to maintain that veneer. Going back to the barbarity of total war would be inconceivable and would damage every bit of legitimacy worked for by Beijing thus far.

There is another point in that. We have learned through history that occupation in media saturated environments is effectively impossible. So land or resource grabs would, if they happened, most likely not spark total war but rather intense, violent guerrilla style or 'Libya-style' military intervention backed by very tough international sanctions. No country in this world today can handle that. It might be partly due to the nature of the contemporary economy that we can say that since polities are so interconnected through capital, and trying to together capture elusive transnational money (where the majority of the world's financial wealth appears to be), they simply do not have the

resources to do what was done in the 1940s for example.

Finally, it is not for the Politburo in Beijing, Putin and his acolytes in Moscow, or the more hawkish elites in India to undergo a paradigm shift. The shift is happening from within the only legitimate power base in existence today: the 7 billion or more individuals alive, the hundreds of billions or more individuals that lived before us, and the inconceivable number of people that are still to live. There is no polity that can resist the totalizing power of an educated, remembering, uncertain, peace-loving, and autocrat-phobic, post-foundational plurality. War has no value – violence kills democracy. How can we not be moving beyond this?

**Antony Ou:** There are nations, like Palestine or Kurdistan, that desperately aspire to build states. By adopting and internalizing the concept of “old sovereigntism”, they are satisfied and content with what they own within their territories without any foreign intervention. Such sovereigntism is contrary to what I understand international “perpetual peace” to be. However, this is often what indigenous minorities and people of peripheral states fight for. Does the concept of nation-state have any residual values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? And should the “unfinished project” of a global citizenry be “on hold” for the sake of “self-determination” and “old sovereigntism”?

**Jean-Paul Gagnon:** I think we need to be clear that self-determination, the creation of new nation-states, and bounding nations within what might be considered more “traditional” understandings of sovereignty are not in any sense



contrarian to peace. Although Michael Mann has, I think, a point that it is at these times that we are at *greater risk* of seeing ethnic violence. I have argued elsewhere that if the allowing for nations to have their own states happened more in history much less blood would have been spilt. We are still reeling from the effects of empire. It will take time for the wounds created by idiotic flag planting and proclamations in the name of 'so and so' over peoples who already 'owned' the land to heal. There is no need for the ever strengthening associations of the plurality of individuals throughout this globe, possibly definable as a global citizenry, to stand at odds to a sovereign Palestine unless this or another new state wanted to make war or violence as its means or end goal.

**Antony Ou:** How shall we operate the constant check and balance regarding the power of nation states? Are you suggesting besides promoting global citizenship across the world, we should also begin to construct an international institution, namely a "world state" by legitimising and monopolizing the use of force? What are the moral possibilities as well as moral dangers of implementing such project?

**Jean-Paul Gagnon:** I am not advocating a world-state. I am an advocate of highly inclusive, capacious, uncertain, and dynamic global democratic governance which I see as a project under constant improvement. Nation-states, depending on how one defines this concept today, are already under complex layers of checks and balances. We only have to look to the roughly 70% of this world's surfaces, depths, and heights. These are all "common zones" or "international spaces". They are regulated by many

different sets of international laws, Conventions, regulations, Resolutions, and options. In the parts of the world that are claimed by nation-states or union-states (as I prefer to term them), or the other roughly 30%, there are too national, subnational, and supranational laws binding the behaviour of polities. This form of control is, I think, only going to get more legitimate as democrats (individuals) and their associations continue to challenge power, autocracy, and namely, the majority of forms of violence.

**Antony Ou:** To a certain degree, the proclamation of "the end of war" is misleading. Besides the reasons that I have laid out so far, I suspect that we might both agree that there are possible military interventions, legitimised by UN resolutions, that should be morally justified. There are plausible and even hypothetical "just wars" (according to Richard Norman, they are "moral tragedies"), in the context of "international anarchy", and every state should have the "responsibility to protect" their neighbouring countries, as advocated by the UN since 2005. When a country suffers from any crimes against humanity, there should be "humanitarian interventions", enforced by legitimate arm forces. Therefore, even if global citizenry prevails in the near future, war never ends, since atrocities exist in different parts of the world. Even if there is a "world government" monopolizing the use of force, and military conflicts change from state conflicts to "punitive expedition" launched by a "benevolent" world government, war never ends.

**Jean-Paul Gagnon:** As I wrote in the article to which you are speaking, I have 

not included forceful “just interventions” as “war”. I was specifically talking about the “total wars” as were known in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and then commented upon the fact that these types of wars have been, and continue to, decline. I am also under the firm hope, and I do see trends to this length, that different forms of violence – ethnic cleansing, genocide, paramilitary political combat, guerrilla warfare, organized crime, and small arms or weapons attack – are too diminishing across all continents.

I think that if violence must be used, it should only be done to achieve a very specific legal aim – and one that was decided in a robust, inclusive and democratic manner. The example I had used during the (still on-going) Libya crisis was that a tactical force involving a plurality of opponents to the Gaddafi regime should have tried to kidnap, or capture, the dictator to bring him before the International Courts of Justice. Maybe this was tried under “top-secret” operations. I am uncomfortable recommending assassination as I think blood begets blood. We need to be cleverer. I don’t have the answers – I am not sure anyone does although I desperately hope we can find some soon. But I think there is something to be said about ensuring “just intervention” really aims to protect civilians, to deny civil war, and to capture the despicable rulers who create such a regime that requires other states or citizens to try to protect the oppressed.

**Notes:**

\* **Antony Ou** is the Research Director of *China Focus, Centre for Strategic Research and Analysis (CESRAN)*.

\*\* **Dr Jean-Paul Gagnon** is a social and political theorist with a Ph.D. in political science. He completed his doctorate at the Queensland University of Technology under the aegis of Australia’s prestigious Endeavour Award.

1. pp.30-33.
2. p.33.
3. p.32.
4. Kinzer, Stephen. (2006). *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*. Times Book, New York.
5. Gagnon, JP. (2012). “Global Leviathan Rising: The Emergence of a Transnational Demoi’s Corporeal Form,” *Political Reflection* 3 (3): 11-14.
6. Gagnon, JP. (2013). *Thinkers in Conversation: Turns in Contemporary Democratic Theory*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
7. p.33, footnote no.5.
8. Antony Ou’s dialogue with Indian nationalists on Agni-5: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pkMqTeL3N0> For further elaboration of his criticism, see Agni-5: the national firework of India: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/antony-ou/agni-5-national-firework-of-india>.
9. For Gagnon’s moral stance of just war theory, specifically on the intervention of Libya, please see Gaddafi and Libya – a case for just intervention?: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/jean-paul-gagnon/gaddafi-and-libya-%E2%80%93-case-for-just-intervention>.
10. Norman, Richard. (1995). *Ethics, Killing and War*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

