

The End of War?

Global Citizenship and Changes to Conflict

This article is concerned with fleshing out a specific argument: that new, contemporary, global citizenship is possible grounds for the prevention of war as it was known in the 20th century. The argument is that in the international arena, it may come to be that the interconnected citizenries of this world will act as the monitory body. (That is, they serve as devices to hold power to account, to question government, private industry, and themselves). This global citizenry does at present act as some type of a check to accumulated power whether in the form of protests against nuclear arms, anti-democratic *in camera* dealings (such as the G20), or clear abuses of one power over another (such as the Israel-Palestine conflict). It is arguable that this trend will only continue to increase as the democratisation of the international arena (or global politics) comes into some form of maturity.

The method for making this point is comparative and temporal. Let us engage the realpolitik of the international arena in circa 1933. Therein, governments had grave concerns for the strengthening and protection of their 'sovereign' territories. The ethos (character) and telos (end) of government

was also arguably different than it is today. In character, states were poorly democratic if compared with contemporary minimalistic standards. In end-goal orientation, it could be argued that states in the 1930s were utopian. For example, the USA had grown into its own as a 'land of hope' yet imprisoned its citizens for speaking out against the 2nd European War.[1] It also had grand hopes and plans for the shaping of its neighbours in Latin America and the Caribbean which would lead to decades of political meddling and illegal assassinations.[2] The Empire of Japan, its rising sun foreshadowing its bloody finish, had near-Nazi ideology and sought the perfection of one world-view at the expense of all others. Europe was feuding. Africa and the Middle East were bleeding under occupation and would continue to suffer for decades to come. But, perhaps most importantly, citizenries were still very much locked into the false conception of the nation-state.[3] There was very little chance for peoples as far as India to unite in cause with those in northern Europe or western Latin America.

Indeed, it feels as if citizens were tantamount to prisoners of the state or at least something far less than free pluralist sovereigns. 'Pluralist' was al- ▶

most politically absurd during that period. We must recall that this was the age of the nation; the singular commonly bound body of people acting as one entity. A great myth told by demagogues and tyrants to sway gullible peoples into the luncies of false hopes and trapdoor policies dictators so often concoct. *'Panem et circenses'*[4] (contemporarily recalled as 'Give them bread and circuses!') Juvenal tells Caesar had once said; *'Qu'ils mangent de la brioche'* (let them eat brioche) was relegated to the mouth of a great princess by Rousseau, and 'we won' was established on a ship-deck by George Bush. But who are 'them' and who are 'we'? I think that question would have been much easier to answer eighty years ago than it is today. And we are much better off because of this complexity and uncertainty over what, where, who, when, and how a citizenry is made. Back then, people were subject – not sovereigns.

Because of that the result during the 1930s was arguably a clear one. Men, mostly, making extremely important decisions behind closed doors, led and forced both their own and other citizens into war. The massive extant literature on the major military conflicts of the 20th century, not that one could own complete mastery of the subject due to its sheer volume, is from one scrutiny of important parts of the literature, inherently clear: states went to war and finished war on decisions often made by a select few. I wonder what could have been if Russians and Germans, Polacks and

Italians, Egyptians and Englanders, for example had the communication technologies we have today. Would the battle of Stalingrad, where various accounts has it, over one million (some say two million) combatants and civilians died, have ever happened? Maybe a Russian would have added a German to Facebook, or a platoon of Germans could have tweeted about how they hated the war and wanted to play football with the Russians across the Volga instead. Maybe List, Paulus, Hoth, von Bock and von Weichs could have exchanged emails with Yeryomenko, Khrushchev and Chuikov. Together they might have started a blog berating and damning Hitler and Stalin for their ludicrous madness and irresponsible follies. But alas, that is all dust in the wind and many of the aforementioned military leaders were arguably bad men. Maybe they would have simply raged against each other in YouTube forums and continued to do battle at the expense of their men. Maybe their men were so indoctrinated they would not have been able to even think of adding a German, Russian or Roma to their Facebook page. Then again, communications technologies may be a good cure for propaganda indoctrinated societies (if only mainland China would permit greater access to information for its plural citizenry!).

Nevertheless, and returning from the abstract, over the decades after the 2nd European War it became very clear to a number of countries embroiled in conflict that citizens stood less and less for imperialist folly and more for a return to normalcy, peace, and the pursuit of non-violent endeavours. Two excellent examples are of course the major anti-war protests during the US-American invasion of Vietnam or the US-American and coalition invasion of Iraq. (In a different example, an often forgotten body is the significant 'at home' protests of German citizens standing completely against the Nazi Party and its sycophantic members from the early 1930s to well after the 2nd European War). The key in this point is that we could argue 'at home' protests to have significantly contributed to the end of large scale, mechanistic, and brutal wars. ▶



In today's growing reality of monitory democracy, of rises in deliberative democracy, and in changes to the nature of representative democracy (including 'injections' of direct democracy at various tiers of government and governance), the empowerment of citizenries is potentially written in stone. Well, so long as we protect our gains and push for more democratic victories. And it is here, in the power of the international body of citizens, that I reason we have the first chance in recent history to pronounce the death of war. This is a contentious statement and is not meant to be my '1989' (no offense to Francis Fukuyama who is both a genius and kind individual). 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. Perhaps most importantly, this work is not predictive: since the 'collapse'[5] of the Cold War (which in itself was a novelty of a war) and the rise of terrorist/anti-terrorist combat, the past twenty or thirty years of violent conflict have been different in scale and type (sadly not intent) to, for example, the 2nd European War.

Rwanda; the ongoing separatist skirmishes in jungles, deserts, and cities; Indonesia's brutal takeover of East-Timor; the invasion of Iraq; the battle for Libya; the removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan; the Georgian crisis; and the Falkland Islands dispute are all unique in their origins and different to the massive scale brutality of total war. Iraq, although it has suffered far too much and far too long, cannot in devastation compare to what Vietnam, Laos, and parts of Cambodia had levelled against them by the USA during the Vietnamese War. The sheer number of bombs dropped into Laos (an illegal activity at that under international law) by the USA is – in extent – practically unbelievable. The massive volume of soldiers involved in the Korean War is also incomparable to Libya or the South Sudanese struggle for independence. The degree of mechanised instruments of war in the 2nd European War from both sides (that is, 'axis' versus 'allies') cannot even be found during the Gulf War where the late Saddam Hussein waged tank wars against the USA and its

NATO allies. (What a horrifying scale of comparison – it is lamentable that we can still to this day say Iraq did not have as many bombs dropped on it as Laos. It is lamentable because the Iraq War is nothing short of a nightmare. I cannot imagine Laos with the noise and inferno caused by gargantuan volumes of bombs. I wish we could never have been able to compare wounds in this way).

Everything, except for the intent to kill and destroy, is different in the wars of the past twenty

Iraq, although it has suffered far too much and far too long, cannot in devastation compare to what Vietnam, Laos, and parts of Cambodia had levelled against them by the USA during the Vietnamese War.

and perhaps even thirty years. Total invasion and occupation with the intent to annex territory is increasingly unrealistic (look to the certainly increasing degree of trouble mainland China will have over the illegal occupation of Tibet and other regions); the goal of holding a territory with the intent to steal natural resources is much harder to do at present due to the power of modern explosives and at home protests (a good example is the extraction of oil from wells in Iraq and the security issues that has posed); and probably most important, the view of one general type of human being as being something un-human has lost all legitimacy. Even in portions of the European or Australian citizenry that are hostile to immigrants (legal and illegal), there is no possible legality to the argument that these are people inherently different to the 'native' population. *Kristallnacht* will not be repeated. It cannot be repeated because citizenries are watching. That is something remarkable and I think these roots were seen, for

example, during the UK riots earlier this year. Individuals and groups left the security of their homes and went, often with no violence, to simply stand and protect the assets of their locality.

These are all weird and wonderful things, but, I presume, not unheard of or unrecorded in history. Certainly groups of people came out at various temporal periods to protect assets during revolts of one kind or another. No, the novelty lies in the 'global' and how global citizenship is impacting the claim of the 'nation-state' over its citizens. Individuals are acting outside of the boundaries of their states and are working with a variety of international, multinational and transnational actors to achieve a complex array of goals. This activity is also central to reflexive modernisation: that ongoing mutation of the state from within itself in response to globalisation. Because of this strengthening of the global citizenry and its growing power capable of weakening the despotic grasps of seemingly lunatic governments, I reason, such will keep us firmly away from the total wars and blitzkriegs of the 20th century. War, as it was once known, is thankfully dead – war is dead.

Notes:

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1. I hesitate, not out of disrespect, but rather clarity, to use the common vernacular of WWI and WWII. 'World War' is a parochial term since in verisimilitude the entire world was not at war. It was rather the European 'world' and 'European' realities which were in total conflict. That is why I prefer to use the First and Second European Wars as it brings greater clarity to the discourse and deploys Beck's (2011) post-universalist ontology. For information related to the imprisonment of citizens during (for the most

part) the Wilson presidential era, see Ernest Freeberg's *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent* (2008, Harvard University Press).

2. I encourage the reader to explore the literature (especially from Latin American scholars) on the 'Condor Years'.
3. See my work on the 'country-state' and 'union-state' in Gagnon (2011). I must once more thank David Rickard, my friend on the silicon waves, for having offered 'union' as a better terminological device to 'country'. If of interest, do look to the commentary of this piece as it forms a substantive part of the project.
4. *Nam qui dabat olim, imperium, fasces, legiones, omnia, nunc se continet atque duas tantum res anxius optat, panem et circenses.* (The people that once bestowed commands, consulships, legions, and all else, now meddles no more and longs eagerly for just two things – bread and circuses!). Juvenal, *Satire X*, pp. 77-81.
5. Despite the palpable rise of certain future giants like China and India, the realities of doom are still carried over from the Cold War era. The end of the 'spy-war' was not so much as a collapse as an almost voluntary capitulation. There is significant difference between the two as power was, by some commentators, not given to the USA after the Soviet Union threw in its cards but rather transferred across political systems into something of a contemporary ersatz democracy in Russia.

Works Cited

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