

# THE MILLENNIUM

whose brave but pitiful resistance against extinction was no match for our weapons and determination to possess their homelands. To this purpose, in addition to obliteration of any tribe within reach, was the use of biocide, the deliberate spread of smallpox among tribes who might more adequately defend their territory than others.

Perhaps the past can be dismissed as irrelevant, but we are incapable of living outside history. We are what we are as a result of history. We are a proud and warlike nation, and we believe our way of life is on the march, that our ideological genes will be grafted onto the global DNA and transform the world into our cultural replica. With virtual dissolution of our Cold War nemesis we now surge forth as missionary warriors, intent on eradicating evil terrorism from the world forever. Simply settling into peaceful coexistence is not enough and has never been. This is the 'New World Order' — the military dominance of world affairs by the USA.

As we parade into this New World Order we should think about dangerous erosions to our principles of liberty and self-determination by embracing world military supremacy, not wholly unlike Rome's exchange of a republic for the rule of Caesars soon after it became the world's first superpower. With more influence than property, the USA acts as industrial civilization's police force, which presumes the real job of a cop is to not only protect the status quo but inflexibly enforce it. To hope that democracy might successfully coexist with military rule is to have missed the point that the United States has functioned as a war technology and 'National Security' state since at least World War II, and indisputably much earlier (the Alien & Sedition Acts, for example).

Looking at history through only the bloody prism of war is to miss much of the best of it, and distorts it — yet wars shape nations and individuals; much of what each claims as heritage and honor is bequeathed by war. Waging war is a nation's most serious business. Robert E. Lee said it was probably fortunate war is so terrible, otherwise we might grow to love it. He had not foreseen its possibilities as video entertainment such as the Persian Gulf War and the airwars over Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan — 'smart' missiles and bombs breaking down doors and falling through factory chimneys; high-tech stuff in which the warriors anonymously and indiscriminately (always hotly denied) murder strangers from the stratosphere. Most significant to the human psyche is that nearly a century of airwarfare has made the very sky that envelops the earth the most dangerous threat to existence.

A people will generally support a war once it is initiated, if for no other reason than they feel there is not much else they can do. That support is considered essential for conducting a war to its end in victory or defeat. In this era of the supposed common person the focus of support is upon the average soldier, sailor and airman(woman), who are not responsible for the wars they fight in but make possible. Bellicose war fever is whipped up to discourage questions of a war's purpose or cost, and to disguise the contradiction that supporting a soldier's warlike duty is a sure way of killing or injuring him (or her).

The enthusiastic outpouring of love and support for the American GI might act instead as a relentless advancing wall that pushes troops into irreversible horror at the same time it crushes underneath its cheering warcry any who would conscientiously object. The soldiers feel compelled to carry out what they see as public mandate, and in the belief that any doubts of their own would be met with disapproval they would do their duty at whatever cost.

Instead of the usual honors as heroes we should pity the hallowed war dead as fools or curse them for being soldiers. It is almost too simple, but without soldiers there would be no wars. Without soldiers Caesar would be a scheming minor politician, Napoleon frustratedly Napoleonic, Hitler an inferior decorator. Soldiers kill, rape, pillage, burn, and if they are unlucky, stupid or badly led they die. If masses of men would not immerse themselves into armies and navies warfare would diminish as a human affliction. All the old deceptions and savage antipathies would continue to burn in our flailing breasts but the scale of havoc would be greatly reduced.

John Reed saw the sinister side of soldiers and anticipated the civic consequence of military rule: "I hate soldiers," he wrote. "I hate to see a man with a bayonet on his rifle, who can order me off the street. I hate to belong to an organization that is proud of being a caste of superior beings, that is proud of killing free ideas so that it may more effectively kill human beings."

This is not the currently popular attitude toward members of the armed forces. It is, however an historically accurate one. The very troops we are exhorted to love and cherish can be turned against us, ordered to suppress dissent and round up political activists. The chilling thought is that in times like these, such repressive acts could have popular support, at least initially, as happened during the Vietnam War with the use of police and national guards. National Security is boilerplated over the Constitution.

Vietnam taught us that a war cannot perpetually continue without public support. That can be a provocation for rallying around a flag and tying it with a yellow ribbon. It is a better argument for refusing to endorse a war so that it might quickly end or perhaps never begin. The war parties always attempt to capture patriotism as their own, and portray dissent against their wars as sedition and disloyalty. But dissent is necessary. It is the true act of patriotism and a more reasonable way to support the troops than thrusting them upon other armies.

"There is no good war and no bad peace," Benjamin Franklin said. But peace is also defined as a period between wars, a time to bury the dead, lick wounds, produce more and newer weapons, sow newer crops of human fodder to continue the genocides of their fathers.

It is difficult to separate peace from its evil twin war — not unlike concentrating on *yang* without including *yin*.



NELSON HARDING

Peace and war are joined at the hip, human perceptions that have few parallels in nature: the rapacious wars of ants are analogous. Somehow we co-inventors of war think we can have life without it — which we baptize as peace.

The questions of how to end warfare are ancient but never as popular as promoting it. The very few who raise the issue of abolishing war have through the centuries been imprisoned, exiled or executed. At the very least they have been ostracized. Pacifism exudes an odor of weakness and appeasement, and pacifists are accused of being agents of an enemy or are dismissed as dupes. Pacifists are themselves in conflict. The central most agonizing question is whether some principles are worth the risk of annihilation. Human life and possibly all organic existence is conceivably so rare in the universe that its loss as a result of conflict over abstract principles peculiar to a point in time would be more intolerable than the loss of those principles, which, human in origin, would just as surely be evaporated in a holocaust. "What difference does it make to the dead," Gandhi said, "whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?"

Solutions to warfare have been ambiguous, insipid and often ridiculous. Most pacifists agree that the only end to warfare will be a world state of some form, but One World theories range from a loose federation of states not unlike the United Nations with the exception that its laws would be binding, to naked utopias and other worldly Edens, or more ominously, Orwellian or Huxlean nightmares of rigid authority and mind control (as well as perpetual war). Most solutions acknowledge the necessity of alternatives to warfare to engage its immense energies. William James suggested in 1914, the year World War 1 began, that there should be a "moral equivalent to warfare," and though his idea that society exhibit the pomp and circumstance of a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta was rather silly (but not out of context with his pompous era), he also thought that "so long as the anti-militarists propose no substitute...no moral equivalent to war... the duties, penalties and sanctions pictured in the utopias they paint are all too weak and tame to touch the military minded."

That is precisely the point. Militarism rules the planet. Military values are taught at every level of education and are

incorporated in the root systems of societal values. Militarism is the antithesis of liberty and democracy and its justice is based on obedience and servitude. The economies of most nations are poured into war machines that posture as defensive instruments and world leaders blackmail their populations with terror, force them to surrender their lives and their children's futures, their wealth and liberties if they possess either, to the gross appetites and deadly illusions of military power. Nightmares of doom are disguised as dreamworlds of prosperity.

Armageddon is the place for the last battle at the end of the world. Almost all religions and myths prophesize a final conflict or cataclysm that will terminate human life, and our history has propelled us to the savage frontier of our most primitive fears. Military castes have been as irresponsible as priests in exhorting doom — they speak of themselves as guardians of peace but prepare the methods for the final combat which is, after all, the shrine of their profession. "War is to a man what childbirth is to a woman," Benito Mussolini was fond of saying.

Putting an end to warfare will not end human conflict or greed, but war should be put aside as a toy of our youth. The ancient assumption that war weeds out the weak, unfit and unlucky to insure strengthened future generations has been disproved by the enormous and indiscriminately devastating wars of the 20th Century. A general who commanded the largest armies in history and who as President of the USA warned the world of the sinister and possibly obliterate consequences of the military/industrial mafia, Dwight Eisenhower once said that "People want peace so much that one of these days government had better get out of the way and let them have it."

The United States commemorates its war dead on Memorial Day, which is at the end of May. It would be the proper occasion to pierce the illusions and deceptions and remember that the hallowed dead would bitterly protest being used to kill others, and to take note of something written by Boris Van: "The day when nobody comes back from a war it will be because war has at last been properly organized."

History's dark glare shines on an Earth too fragile for the titanic clashes of its past. Humanity, however, responds quicker to hatred and opportunity than to peace for its own sake, and never are these traits more well represented than through a war's victors arguing over the spoils of a defeated nation. Civilizations have profited immensely from wars, and warfare has progressed civilization's expanse and technologies. Yet war has also turned out the lights of civilization. Humanity has been set back centuries by its predilection for war — long periods of decline and retrogression. Generations denied opportunities of learning and rebuilding. Interminable cycles of darkness.

Human antipathy does not go away easily or for very long. Old hatreds scab over only briefly and soon re-erupt. Someone somewhere covets something possessed by a neighbor — land, wealth, power. An insurgency plans an assault or ambush. Terrorists target innocents. A newly established nuclear power readies to flex it on an old enemy. Big war stuff trickles down from defunct Cold War arsenals into the grubby little hands of schoolchildren who arm themselves in the manner of gunfighters or gangsters.

Peace loving peoples commit genocide upon rivals. Large parts of the world act as laundries for ethnic cleansing. Countries or persons publicly declare themselves as pacifist yet act as vicious as attack dogs. Peace is not on the earth but a few feet under it for millions who are slaughtered by fellow humans for reasons peripheral and perishable.

"With them in hell," wrote Wilfred Owen, regarded the best poet of World War 1 (and perhaps the best war poet ever), killed a week before Armistice:

*"the sorrowful dark of hell  
Whose world is but the trembling of a flare  
And heaven but as the highway for a shell."*



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