

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES OF WAR: Imagining the impossible

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"War is the darkest spot on humanity's history."

P.R. Sarkar*

"Alternative Futures of War: Imagining the Impossible", in Arthur Shostak, ed.,
Beyond 9/11 and the Iraq War: In the Shadow of War, Vol 4., Philadelphia, Chelsea
House, 2005, 155-165.

Asking if war has a future may appear ludicrous, given that the 20th century was one of the bloodiest ever, and that scores of low grade wars are currently maiming and killing countless thousands. You may wonder why even ask? Haven't we always had war? Won't we always have war?

At times, however, questioning can lead us toward a different type of analysis, possibly even giving us the means to create a future without war. To change the future, we must be able to imagine a different future. As a Lithuanian leader recently said (paraphrasing): 75 years ago, it was impossible to imagine a post-communist world. Then twenty years ago, we could imagine it, but we did not understand how it could practically come about. Now, we are a proud and free part of the European Union. (1)

The impossible *can* become the possible, first by imagining, then by creating a plausible processes, and bravely and persistently taking necessary steps. So, *we must* raise the question - *Does war have a future?* We must challenge the notion that just because war always was, it always has been. Writes Fred Polak:

Many utopian themes, arising in fantasy, find their way to reality. Scientific management, full employment, and social security were all once figments of a utopia-writers' imagination. So were parliamentary democracy, universal suffrage, planning, and the trade union movement. The tremendous concern for child-rearing and universal education and for Garden Cities all emanated from the utopia. [It] stood for the emancipation of women long before the existence of the feminist movement. All the current concepts concerning labor, from the length of the work week to profit-sharing, are found in the utopia. (Polak, *The Image of the Future*, 1973, 137-138.)

Conceiving, of course, is only part of the challenge. We need to go on to create and

implement social invention. Specifically, we need to devise new methods to resolve international conflicts. We need to challenge the entire notion of armed conflict, as conducted by powerful governments and weaker organizations.

To do so, we need to first analyze the multiple causes of war. Four levels of analysis can help. First is the level of the litany, the unquestioned "truth" said over and over, presented daily on video and TV. The second is the level of the system, the historical economic, political, environmental, and technological reasons. The third is the deeper cultural perspective, the worldview we live in. This is hard to see, as we breathe it. Just as fish do not know they swim in water, we can rarely see our worldview, unless we begin a process of deep questioning. Finally, is the unconscious story, the group consciousness or the deeper myth.

1. **The Litany.** In thinking about war and peace, the superficial analysis usually contends that If we can find and kill all the bad guys, and also destroy all the rogue nations, everything will be ok. From James Bond to Arnold Schwarzenegger to Steven Segal, the plot is predictable. But as Mike Myers's satiric movie character *Austin Powers* suggests, evil may not only be out there, but it may be also in us. We are often - knowingly or unwittingly - complicitors in evil. Hence, this vastly over-simplifying approach has awesome limitations.

2. **Systemic Analysis.** The focus here is on historical, economic, political, environmental, and technological reasons for war and peace. For example, proponents emphasize the need to rapidly transform the arms export industry, as by making the export of killing products illegal. This would have great benefit for the whole world, and sharply reduce profits of leading arm manufacturing nations (the USA, China, Britain, Israel and other rogue armament countries). (2) This process has begun with nuclear arms, and while there are many problems ahead, illegal shipping of nuclear arms appears to be diminishing dramatically.

However, any arms ban would not work unless there were security guarantees for those states afraid of aggression. That is, states import arms because they are afraid of enemies within the nation and without (and use this fear to hold on to and extend their power). As well, the military elite in all states becomes accustomed to living in a shopping plaza with endless goodies. Global disincentives would be needed as well.

A world governance structure that could provide security through a type of insurance scheme or through a global police system may help to reduce the demand aspect of

global weapons. The supply option would require big states to end their addiction to easy money. . Indeed, "Every year the most powerful nations of the world spend over 1,000 billion dollars in weapons. The dollars saved could be spent on forming peace activist forces trained in mediation and peace-keeping skills." (3)

Transformation must occur most urgently in the global economy. Poverty, and more accurately, relative deprivation knowing others just as talented as you and your society are doing financial better because of unfair advantages are among the deeper causes of conflict and war.

We must create a Glocalization Movement to help end poverty, and see to it that wealth circulates with more justice than at present. Glocalization attempts to keep the benefits of globalization (freer movement of ideas, capital, people) along with the benefits of the local (keeping money circulating in your own area, ensuring that while there is growth there is distribution as well). (4)

3. **Worldview.** Other dimensions of society than the military-industrial complex also need transformation, especially our worldview. At present, it helps create the conditions for war. Moments of national military trauma become part of our identity creation. War creates a national consciousness we know who we are through battles with others. Whether it is the Star Spangled Banner and the victory of the American colonists over the British, or the defeat of Serbs in Kosovo, war defines who we are. (5)

But this is not the only form of possible self-identification. We can define ourselves differently. A planetary project whether transforming global warming or creating a global governance system or ending poverty or even space exploration seems more likely to help us find deeper reasons for being than available in warfare. We also need peace education that celebrates *ahimsa*, that celebrates moments of transcendence, that teaches us how to mediate conflict and that celebrates the challenges humanity has faced (not any particular tribe within it) and will continue to face. (6)

4. **Myth and Metaphor**

Underneath this system of war is a defining Group Consciousness, a deeper culture. Challenging the idea of war as *natural* means challenging three pillars, or the thought that life is about domination, survival of the fittest, and ego-identity.

The first pillar is *patriarchy*, or dominator-oriented politics. Truth, nature, and reality are defined in dominator, rather than in partnership terms. What matters most is who is above and who is below. We see the world in terms of feeling superior or feeling inferior. Cultures are seen as evolved or primitive, civilized or barbaric.

Second, evolution is seen as *survival of the fittest*, and thus war is seen as just since the fittest have survived - instead of as an evolutionary failure. Victory thus justifies evolution. However, it is cooperation among bacteria that has led to our evolutionary development. Cooperation at all levels maximizes our survival and thrival possibilities. (7)

Third, identity is defined in terms of *ego attachment to land, race, and language*. Thus identity is seen in terms of geo-sentiment (my land, love it or leave it!), race (my color is superior) or linguistic politics, and not in more universal terms. Religion is seen as exclusionary, for the chosen few, or those with special access to the transcendental, and not for all. While this may have been necessary in tribal politics to identify "stranger danger," there are no reasons for this today at the global level.

How can these views be challenged? First, by asserting cooperation *can* lead to mutual learning. Second, by asserting evolution is *not* merely about survival of the fittest, but involves three additional aspects: An attraction to the sublime, even spiritual; an ability to be guided through human reason and action; and an ability to become ethical. And finally, by asserting we *can* develop a planetary *Gaian* consciousness that sees the planet as living. We live in symbiotic relationship to our hosts, and we need to nurture the planet, as she nurtures us. We *can* create our destiny. (8)

Inner and Outer, Individual and Society.

Along with our four levels of analysis, we can analyze the futures of war with a simple two by two table approach. On one axis is from inner to outer, and on the other axis is individual and collective. From this table, we can different types of strategies emerge. The challenge is to engage at *all* levels: an individual's inner self (meanings); an individual's outer self (behaviours); society's inner self (myths and collective unconscious); and society's collective outer (structures and institutions)

Using this type of analysis, there are many activities and strategies we can engage in, and most importantly, begin to imagine and create a world without war.

Transforming the Field of Understanding

Prior to the war on Saddam Hussain and Iraq, Robert Muller commented that he was not depressed at what might happen, since millions were in fact waging peace.

(9) Yes, it was unlikely Bush and Hussain were capable of a peaceful and just resolution, but their worldviews had motivated millions to express frustration, and to call for, indeed, meme a new world.

Memes are like genes but focused on ideas. Memes are ideas that pass from person to person, become selected because they offer us advantages in our thinking, in our survival and thrival. Certainly, war as a meme, I would argue, has reached its limits in terms of offering longer lasting solutions to Earth's problems, I would argue.

Another world is possible! We need a field that begins the process of moving beyond the world of hawks and doves. And a world that recognizes that multiple traditions are required to transform war and peace. Within our histories are resources of peace, whether Islamic, Vedic, Christian, Buddhist or secular.

But first we must challenge the litany of war. Unless it is contested, we will assume that because it *is*, it always will be. The next task is to challenge the systems that support war: the military-industrial export complex; national education systems; our historical identities. We also need to challenge the worldviews that both support and are perpetuated by war: patriarchy and survival of the fittest. Ultimately, we need a new story of what it means to be human.

Alternative Futures

What then are the alternative futures of warfare? Four stand out as plausible possibilities, and seriously challenge us. First, **War now and war forever**. We cannot transform war since humans are violent and greedy for land, territory and ideas. Witness History. Whether it is capitalists ruling, or prime ministers and priests or warriors and kings, or workers revolting, it is war that results and is used by each social class to maintain its power.

The nature of war changes depending on which social class is in power (worker, warrior, intellectual, or capitalist) and it also changes depending on the nature of technology. Most recently it has been air power with real time surveillance that has dominated. Nano-technology will probably expand humanity's capacity to become both more destructive and more precisely targeted. The capacity of one leader to hold a population hostage, as with Milosevic, Pol Pot, and Saddam Hussain, is likely to decrease dramatically. However, at the same time, the capacity of any person to hold a nation hostage will increase.

Second, **War becomes ritualized or contained.** Generally, in this future scenario, we move to a peace culture, but periods of war remain. However, these are rapidly contained or conducted with the authority of a global governance system. War remains an option, even if a less desirable one. As well, war is used by those challenging the world governance system, and by areas not totally integrated by the world system. War could even become ritualized, either conducted through virtual means or via sports. In such ways, aggression is contained and channelled.

Third, **War itself changes.** Genetic engineering and other invasive technological procedures search for the "aggression gene" with the hope of eliminating the behavior that leads to war. Some states, however, reserve the right to manipulate the "aggression" gene to make even fiercer fighters. Deeper efforts to transform systems of war are not attempted, as nations are unwilling to let go of their war-industry profits. Efforts to tame war wind up maintaining the status-quo.

Last and most idealistic among the four possibility, **War disappears.** It does so because of changes in the system of war (the military-industrial complex), in the worldview that supports war (patriarchy, capitalism, identity politics) and in the nature of what it means to be human. We take an evolutionary step toward full humanness. Proponents note we have had periods in history without war. Moreover, humans have begun to imagine a world without war. (10)

Conclusion

Which of these futures is most likely? Historical experience suggests the first scenario - *war now and forever*. However, the future informed by new readings of evolutionary theory maintains *war disappears* is also possible. At the same time, since new ideas are often taken over by structures of power and those in power, we should

not be surprised by the *containment of war* scenario or even the *geneticization of war*. In short, all four options must be taken seriously.

What, then, as creative shapers of a more desirable future, should we do? I recommend we remain hopeful about creating a future *without* war and act across our lives to achieve it. We must also work on achieving peace *within*. We must employ mediation and conflict resolution in all of our institutions. And we must never stop struggling against social systems and worldviews that help create wars.

Notes

1. Interview on Australia National Radio. August 2003
2. However, given current economic dependence on arms export (even as with tobacco exports), nations should be given a decade or decades to overcome their addiction to easy arms money. Of course, there would still be illegal arms smuggling but at least the large states would not be condoning it. Thus, certainly realizing this will not be easy. It would require international treaties that could be verified. But why might this occur? As with other regulations, pressure from lobby groups, social movements and nongovernmental organizations might lead to new arms sales regulations. In addition, a global regime is possible if a player wants advantage, that is, because of too many arms dealers, a particular player, like the USA intervenes to regulate the market so that it can enhance its own trading at the expense of others. It also may be realized in a step by step fashion, that is, certain arms are banned - land mines - as a first step, and then slowly other arms are banned.

As well, as sticks, there are carrots in the emerging peace business. Peace business is based on the ideas of Johan Galtung and Jack Santa-Barbara, Ph.D. trained as an experimental social psychologist, founded a company that became the largest of its kind in Canada, and won the "50 Best Privately Managed Companies" award in 1997. He has founded a new institute to promote integration of ecological and economic goals in government decision making.

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~mpeia/projectteam2.html>

3. Julio Godoy, "Political Obstacles Slow Path to Goals," Other News - Roberto Savio / IPS <rosos@topica.email-publisher.com.
4. Sohail Inayatullah, theme editor, Global Transformations and World Futures,

UNESCO Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems. Oxford, EOLSS Publishers, 2002.

5. Hoping for an invasion from Mars as in *Mars Attacks* and endless other movies only continues to create an us-them.

6. We need to re-write textbooks in nearly every nation and move away from the Great Man or Dynastic theory of macrohistory. Creating alternative futures requires not only requires a rethinking and reacting of the present but recovering our lost and alternative histories. Just as there are many futures ahead of us, there are different histories to explore. This is exploring history from other perspectives that of a worker, the wife or mother of a killed warrior, a tree, ice, other cultures, and even technologies histories such as that of the toilet. What we think, write about, remember repeats the paths trodden in history, and thus, creates the paths we are likely to travel in the future. The work of Riane Eisler is exemplary - www.partnershipway.org. Also, see, Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah, eds, *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*. Westport, Ct, Praeger, 1997. Sarkar, for example, argues there are four types of history – economic, peoples, intellectual and dynastic.

7. http://www.westbynorthwest.org/artman/publish/printer_340.shtml. Article by Lynee Twist, March 14, 2003

8. See the writings of biologist Lynn Margulis and evolutionary biologist Elisabeth Sahtouris, See also David Loye's alternative reading of Darwin - *Darwin's Lost Theory of Love*. San Jose, Iuniverse, 2000. Also, see, David Loye, ed., *The Great Adventure*. New York, State University of New York Press, 2004. <http://www.edge.org/documents/ThirdCulture/n-Ch.7.html>. Elisabeth Sahtouris, *Earth Dance: Living Systems in Evolution*. San Jose, Iuniverse.com, 2002. This remains among the lasting messages of the Star Trek series, especially in its latest incarnations.

9. This worldview transformation is a change in two main symbols we use to metaphor war. This is the hawk and the dove. Can there be a third space, another story that can represent a world without war but with justice? Coming up with a new metaphor will not solve the issue, but our failure to do so highlights our conceptual problems. Perhaps looking for stories in our evolutionary past up and down the food chain - is not the way to go. Creating a post-war world may mean looking to the future for ways out.

10. To create the new means being able to first conceptualize it. Next is finding the means to make the impossible, possible. The last stage is merely one of details. The details in this case are about creating a culture of meditation and of conflict resolution. This means making it central in schooling at one level, and beginning to create the process of global-local governance, where war becomes impossible.

References.

For more on Sarkar, see Sohail Inayatullah, *Understanding Sarkar: The Indian Episteme, Macrohistory and Transformative Knowledge*. Leiden, Brill, 2002.

Fred Polak, *The Image of the Future*. Amsterdam, Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1973, 137-138.