War, Peace and Civilizations

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Identifications

In order to discuss this rather broad set of relationships, it is probably desirable to limit the contexts. Definitions of war, peace and civilizations are all controversial, so rather than attempt them, it may be well to identify what is being considered here, and grant that each could be extended further.

War encompasses violent, physical conflict among political entities or among substantial factions within these entities.

Peace is considered to be an absence of such violent conflict. It includes situations in which anger or hostility is openly expressed, and in which arms buildups occur, if there is little physical conflict. A situation of mutual war preparation between potential adversaries who nevertheless do not fight would be a period of peace. The term cold war has been used to describe such a period, but it could better be described as a cold peace. Situations in which there is a high rate of violence, as in some large cities, or episodes of terrorism, do not fit comfortably within either of these parameters. Still by almost any measure, peace is normal, war exceptional (Melko, 1996).

As for civilization, attempts to define it by groups of critical thinkers usually fail. For the purposes of this essay, let us say that they are large societies possessing a degree of cultural autonomy, agriculture, literacy, cities, religion and government. They date back about six thousand years and have their origins along the Tigris-Euphrates and Nile rivers. There will be debates, however, about the sequence and importance of the qualities mentioned or omitted and the extent to which they can be distinguished from primitive or nomadic societies.

Political Forms

Civilizationists tend to distinguish three political forms within civilizations. Terms frequently used to describe these are feudal, state and imperial. The forms have been recurrent as political systems emerge, disintegrate, or reconstitute; they tend to be periods of stress in which political systems arise or reconstitute.

I am going to focus on state systems, probably the most prevalent form in history, as it is today. State systems contain political entities we call states that are limited in boundary by other states and are at least minimally autonomous. They lack a central government.

Usually this enlarged system occurs within a single civilization, although states on the periphery are likely to interact with peripheral states in neighboring civilizations. At some periods there may be more than one system within a civilization, but they tend to coalesce. (Toynbee III: 301-306, Wilkinson 1985, Wesson 1978: 10-18).
As these states begin to encounter one another, conflict among them ensues. Such a system of recurring conflict would seem to be unstable in that power obviously increases and decreases within the states as leadership changes or succeeding generations lack the taste or skill for governance, diplomacy or warfare. Yet such a system can also have long-term stability, continue for decades or centuries, experiencing recurrent warfare, but also longer periods of relative peace. (Toynbee IX: 234-287; Coulborn 1966: 414-416; Wight 1977: 46-72, 110-152; Wesson 1978: 28-35; Wilkinson 1985).

How do groups of states, having no dominant government, maintain stability? One theory is that if one state threatens to become too powerful, others may form alliances against it. Thus a balance of power may come into existence and preserve the system. This leads to frequent changes of alliance as perceptions of power change, hence a degree of instability within such systems. This has been the prevailing view of the realist school of thought in the West, perhaps because it describes the European state system from 1618 to 1945 (Morgenthau 1978: 171-228; Wight 1977: 66-67, 96-97, 150-152; Levy 1983: 8-49; Waltz 1979: 117-128, 163-170).

While dominant states have conquered all others and created spectacular empires that have received much attention from historians, it is probable that dominant powers more often could not or did not seek to conquer all other states. More frequently what Morgenthau calls a status quo policy (1978: 42-47) emerged because the leaders of the dominant power considered their present situation preferable to the risks of further conquest and the difficulties of maintaining distant territories.

In the past few decades the concept of hegemony has been greatly elaborated, perceived as a normal and recurrent aspect of state systems. The consensus goes something like this. One state, over a period, becomes dominant, but usually that does not mean the termination of the state system. Either others ally to prevent that from happening, or hegemony represents the height of that state’s ambition or its leaders’ perception of its power. Its rulers are satisfied to lead within the system, and other states accept this, because they perceive that this situation brings systemic order. There will be other great powers within the system, that is, states strong enough to disrupt the order if they choose to do so. But so long as they have sufficient power to control their own sphere of influence, usually over secondary powers within their region, they may accept the status quo for many decades. (Toynbee III: 299-306; Doran 1983, Levy 1985, Modelski 1987: 7-50, Wilkinson 1985: 21-32; 1994).

From the hegemonic perspective, the stable periods of a state system are those in which a hegemon is clearly established. This view challenges the earlier balance of power perspective, which views stable periods as those when no hegemon threatens to dominate.

It sometimes happens that two great powers become dominant within a civilization. From a balance of power perspective this polarization of power should seem to be an automatic crisis, because there is little room for shifting alliances. Similarly, from a
hegemonic perspective, it would seem that there would have to be a conflict between the two to determine hegemony. A major conflict may indeed ensue, but not always, as we know from the 20th century example of the United States and the Soviet Union. There are many other cases of great powers achieving accommodation, e.g., Gupta-Vakataka or Sultanate of Delhi and Vijajanagar in India or Aztecs and Tarascans in Mesoamerica.

Probably the number of powers in a state system does not much influence stability. More great powers provide more room for shifting alliances, but such shifts can also be destabilizing, as in the shift of alliances between mid-eighteenth century European wars or most notably, the almost yearly shifts in alliances in the forty year Diadochid War that followed the death of Alexander the Great.

If, as is less frequently the case, one state succeeds in conquering all within the system or civilization, an imperial system may emerge, the dominant state assuming direct or indirect governance over the whole of the civilization. Imperial systems encompassing all or large portions of a civilization can last a long time—in Egypt, Persia, The Mediterranean, China and India. These were perceived to bring relative peace compared to state systems, but at the cost of replacing vitality with an oppressive, sterile and often decadent society and culture.

State systems can persist over long periods, and usually major conflicts recur among the great powers—those capable of having a real influence on the system—but do not lead to the termination of the system. But if a system is terminated, it almost always happens because one state decisively defeats all the others, not because the states reach a mutual accommodation.

We should be careful about such classifications, because regional situations can cause remarkable transformations. While a developmental sequence from feudal to state to imperial system can sometimes be discerned, reconstitutions, circumventions and reversions occur so often that the transformation of a state to an imperial system can hardly be called the norm. The state system may become chaotic and regress to a feudal system until it recovers, or it may experience a devastating general war, and still emerge a state system. The government of an incipient imperial system may soon fail and the state system resumes. Where imperial systems have existed for long periods, and a tradition of state systems is weak, feudal systems can develop within an imperial domain. (Quigley 1979: 150-151; Wesson 1967: 362-373; Melko 1969: 101-108, 1973: 141-171; Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 133).

**War and Peace**

The aims and character of war change as a civilizational system moves from feudal to state to imperial stages. And peace also takes on a different style and context in these different systems. Industry and science, however, so transformed capacity for war in the twentieth century, that it is questionable whether an awareness of civilizational history will be of much help in predicting the future of war, not to mention coping with it.
Civilization follows the development of agriculture, and for some time it was perceived that true warfare began with civilization (Eckhardt 1992: 1-26). The image of the peaceful primitive, however, has been undercut by anthropological observance of contemporary primitive societies and applying of the concept of fatalities per hundred thousand per year that was being applied in the study of civilized warfare. When this measure is applied to existing primitive societies, the measures of violence can be appalling. Agriculture and civilization probably changed the causes and aims of warfare, with control of territory, and possibly population pressure, playing a more important role.

In feudal systems, warfare recurs frequently among knights or militias supported by landowners, the stakes being autonomy and vassalage. These conflicts are most frequently local, occasionally regional. Rarely will one lord gain suzerainty over an entire civilization. Even if he does, such a feudal empire will be essentially a network of feudal relations, lacking central government and likely to end with the death of the dynamic and capable lord who fashioned it. Charlemagne comes to mind for Westerners, and Rushton Coulborn fashioned the term “ghost empires” for such entities, in that they are mistakenly perceived as empires recalling a centralized, bureaucratic empire that preceded a reversion to feudalism (1966: 421-423).

Peace tends to be seasonal in feudal systems. Warfare stops in cold weather, and often at times when peasants are needed for sowing or harvesting. But warfare is seasonal also, and pretty nearly annual.

In state systems, warfare has tended to occur between states, the stakes most often being maintenance of territory and acquisition of the territory of others. Sometimes, however, a rising state may be seeking recognition, acknowledgment that it should be treated as a great power, a power to be consulted and included in conferences. Sometimes a declining power may be seeking to maintain its reputation. Occasionally a state will be simply keeping its armed forces in shape, which was a factor in the onset of the general wars of Louis XIV, and the main purpose of the flower wars between the Aztecs and the Tlascalans.

In these conflicts, some states may be perceived to be great powers, capable of defending themselves and acquiring territory from others. Lesser powers survive, however, by making alliances with great powers, or being supported by great powers that do not want them to fall under the control of others. Sometimes, because of outstanding political and military leadership, a dominant power will arise. This can cause a general war in which other great powers unite to defend against the perceived power of this hegemon, or it can lead to relative peace, as others acquiesce in the hegemony and allow or even invite the hegemon to intervene in and help settle disputes. But the state system is likely to experience recurrent warfare (Toynbee II: 104-107, IX: 251-254; Levy 1985: 362-365; Melko 2005).

Some periods are clearly more given to conflict than others, and if such periods last long enough, we may label them “Periods of Contending States” or “Times of
Troubles,” but it is difficult to find consistent regularities in these histories. Political scientists studying single civilizations are as given to searching for cycles of warfare as are the civilizationists. If they seek, they find, and often they have felt there was enough consistency in these perceived cycles to predict the future of war or peace (e.g., Toynbee VI: 312-321, Melko 1990b: 27-29, Modelski 1996: 25-26, Blaha 2002). But, again, the range of agreement on patterns of warfare in a single civilization is weak, and when an attempt is made to find them in a number of civilizations, the results are unconvincing. As is the case with civilizational patterns in general, there are just too many variables. Reconstitution, differences in civilizational pattern, technological developments, the chances of leadership and creativity on the part of the historian are only a few of the variables that may indicate trends, but in combination scarcely justify prediction. Patterns can be achieved only with a considerable amount of rationalizing, ignoring and reclassification. If violence is required and does not appear, it can be found in events that otherwise would have been dismissed as inconsequential, or situations that should have been violent but were not.

Crises are often accompanied by strong collective feelings. Extremists, who are probably always present, become more visible, receive more approval. Whether motivated by religion or nationalism, they believe the cause is right, important and worth dying for. After prolonged war and suffering, moderates, who weigh these considerations against other values including life, may finally prevail and settle the conflict.

The difficulty of finding cycles of wars in state systems is daunting. If the historian is looking for general wars within civilizations, he must delineate the civilizations, the great powers and the wars themselves (not perceived as such by the participants). When he compares them over millennia in different civilizations, he may find interesting similarities, but a set of long term consistent durations are much more likely to be works of art, contributing to wisdom and perception, but hardly reliable barometers for prediction or policy.

Studies of state systems have produced a plethora of theories about recurrent types of interaction such as the alternating functions of moderates and extremists in settlements and recurrence of conflict (Huntington 1996: 266-267) or theories of enduring rivalries (Thompson 2002). These are interesting examples of normal science. Working out and testing such patterns occupy international relations journals. More difficult would be to work out the civilizational differences in such patterns, where the defining of moderates varies more by civilizational context and the hypotheses and perceptions of the observer. For the civilizationist, this would involve an impossible amount of reading or very sophisticated use of the computer, for he would have to be aware of the refutations, the general work of the observers, and the skill of whoever compiles computer indexes. Moreover, refutation is always more interesting than replication, easier to do if a couple of examples can be found, and probably easier to get published than more difficult efforts that tend to confirm.
Keynote Lectures

Peace is normal in state systems. General wars involving most of the great powers of a civilization take place less than 10 per cent of the time, and even they involve only sporadic fighting. Even during the World Wars, more than 85 per cent of the months were free of fighting. The rest of the time there may be a regional or local war here and there, but most of the states are at peace. Between the Thirty Years War and the Napoleonic, and again between the Napoleonic and World Wars, European fatalities from war averaged fewer than eight per hundred thousand per year, around the 20th Century American rate for homicides. Individual states may maintain peace for centuries. Occasionally there will be decades of peace for an entire civilization (Melko 1990, 2001b).

It is probably more satisfactory to say that there are wars and peaces in history that are reminiscent of others in the same or other civilizations and to look for similarities and differences in each. We may be able to gain some insights into a present situation by comparing it with the past, but we are unlikely to be able to predict the future in any detail, and often not at all.

The study of peace has its own problems. The scholar seeking peace must look for periods when no violence is described, then explore these for kinds of violence that do not make history, such as peasant or industrial rebellions that fail to effect change. Then he must make decisions about how much violence may be considered acceptable in what seems otherwise a period of peace. Peace is achieved when great powers are satisfied with the current situation to the extent that they think war will not improve it. This applies whether a hegemon exists or not. It may be that a hegemon is perceived as preserving a situation that is better than any other that is likely to be achieved, or it may be that the defeat of a hegemon creates a situation in which no power poses an overwhelming threat to others (Melko 1973: 1-10, 187-188; 1996; 1998; 2001a: 202-203, 208-11; Melko, Weigel, et al. 1981: 1-11; Melko and Hord 1984: 1-5, Kacowicz 1998: 6-11).

These perceptions can change over time by the advent of an aggressive government or by changes in the strength of various powers including the hegemon. This could be summarized by stating that when normative consensus about the adequacy of the present situation exists, peace is likely to continue. All of this, of course, is quite unsatisfactory for finding a formula for peace, nor does it resolve the disagreement between balance of power and hegemonic theories, nor take into consideration varieties of civilizational pattern.

Impotence appears to be a recurrent factor in peace. In much of history too, with defense being stronger than offense, weapons limited to spears and arrows or muskets, attacking states having to protect their supply lines, and economies being based on agriculture with populations limited, states simply did not have the power and resources necessary for more than regional conquest. Indeed, Wilkinson’s recent research (2005) suggests that state systems lacking either alliances or hegemon have
been the most common form in civilized history. Impotence because of inability to defend against nuclear counter attack has not been sufficiently tested.

Economic integration, a great hope for the future, received mild support from peace research, though economic connections often fail to prevent political warfare. Democracy is a relatively recent event and is still being appraised, one difficulty being the difficulty of determining actual degree of franchise. The same is true of the idea that there may be stages of peace in the process of evolving.

Toynbee’s perception that general peace follows general war was not well supported by my study of general wars. In 17 of 38 cases a civilizational peace of at least four decades did follow a general war. At a very rough estimate, in ten civilizations, in periods when state rather than imperial systems prevailed, general wars were occurring about nine percent of the time, general peace about three percent. The remaining 88 per cent involved secondary and regional wars in parts of the civilizations, periods Wilkinson refers to as characterized by “general normalcy.” Despite these concrete sentences, it should be recalled that such a study is, from the beginning, built on a series of successive reifications (Toynbee IX: 281-291) Melko 2001; 208-210; Melko and Wilkinson 1992).

Imperial systems have problems maintaining internal peace, but their situation is different from that of the hegemon. They are expected to intervene actively, to use military force to put down rebellion, just as the government of a state would do. When the empire is well governed, or perhaps badly governed but powerful, such conflicts will be less frequent than they are likely to be within a state system. Empires can provide long periods of internal peace for large areas and populations (Melko 1973: 43-44; Melko, Weigel, et al. 1981: 72-82, 107-121).

The conclusions of the peace in history group with which I worked were that circumstances supporting the achievement of peace were “highly contextual, achievable under many different circumstances, and often dependent on the desire of rulers and policy makers to achieve or maintain peace, and their ability to assess and respond to existing and perhaps changing situations.” That is not a very helpful formula for future policy makers, but it does not preclude the possibility that the combination of an increasing number of democracies, a great increase in world trade, and the long term development of zones of peace might create a political equivalent of the industrial revolution, increasing possibilities for world harmony as the economic transformation has for world production.

There seems to be a similarity between the world systems idea of a core country maintaining the peace and the international studies perception of hegemony. The international studies group perceives hegemony as effectively maintaining peace so long as its position is recognized and accepted. Huntington believes the core country keeps peace where it is perceived as a cultural kin (1996: 207-209). It is implicit in the hegemonic idea that lack of a strong core country makes it difficult to resolve war.

Only East Asian and Byzantine Civilizations have had long-term core countries and while East Asia has had long periods of peace, the history of the Byzantine Empire
has been rather stormy. Hegemons have functioned to preserve peace, but they have also created major wars in seeking to extend their dominance, which is why both hegemonic and balance of power theories can find lots of support.

Farhat-Holzman states that more people have been killed in the name of religion than for any other reason (2002: 48). Challenged on this, she produced an impressive list: Biblical slaughter of 3,000 by Moses when he returned from Mt. Sinai; Alexander’s slaughter of Zoroastrians; Roman slaughters of Jews; Constantine’s slaughter of pagans; Crusader slaughter of Muslims, Jews, Byzantine Christians, Albigensians and Cathars; Ottoman slaughters of Christians in Turkey; Hindu slaughters of Buddhists in India; Inquisition slaughters of heretics, Jews, Mesoamericans and Andeans; the religious wars of Europe; Polish Catholic and Russian Orthodox slaughter of each other and Jews; Shiite slaughters of Sunnis and Zoroastrians under the Savafids in Persia; estimates of two million murdered as witches in the 17th and 18th centuries; Turkish murder of Christian Armenians during World War I; German slaughter of Jews during World War II; Stalin’s slaughter of Jews, Muslims, Orthodox and Protestants; the Indian-Pakistani wars and slaughters since 1948; slaughters possibly in the millions during wars in Sudan between Muslims and Christians; wars between Christians and Muslims, between Armenians and Azeris, Russians and Chechens; the slaughter of moderate Muslims, Jews and Baha’is in Iran, and of Shiites in Iraq in the 1980s and 90s (Letter, 2003).

The list does not prove the original statement, because there is no quantitative measurement, of which Farhat-Holzman is anyway suspicious (2002: 89-94), because it is often difficult to sort out religious from other motivations. She also points out that she does not say religion is the most important cause of warfare (letter, 2003). But there is no doubt that religion has played a major role in motivating war, and war has played a major role in permitting religiously motivated slaughter. This is a question that ought to be explored further by a civilizationist or world historian.

Snyder, on the other hand, sees religion as a cause of violence when a civilization is carving out a niche, repelling competitors, or reforming disintegrating structures. The Koran contains powerful passages on tribal war, notably jihad. Without such passages, Islam might not have survived. But it works for peace in supporting the creation of effective institutions and promoting internal cooperation. It can be manipulated, as when fundamentalists use it to support the enforcement of tribalism (2003: 39-40, 45).

Religious belief provides powerful ideological support for war, just as it provides scope for cooperation. The Bible, of course, provides passages in Joshua, Judges and Samuel on the extermination of unbelievers for the sake of territory perceived as sacred, while peace is extolled in Micah and the Gospels. How scriptures are interpreted depends greatly on civilizational pattern as well as the contexts of a particular period.

The work of the group studying long periods of peace indicates that internal peace correlates with state religions in situations lacking external threat in China, Japan,
Southeast Asia and Ancient Egypt. Stevens-Arroyo points to many cases through history in which peace was maintained for long periods between or among Jews, Christians and Muslims (2006). On the other hand, religious unity failed to provide peace within Muslim and Christian states sharing a region or civilization, which suggests that culture pattern is also a factor, especially where the concept of heresy arises.

Peace was also managed for long periods where government tolerance permitted and protected several religions, as in the Achemenid and Mughal empires or even in externally threatened states such as post-Cromwellian Britain and 16th century Poland and Brandenburg, or where religion does not seem to have been a central concern as in many Greco-Roman states, the Phoenician states, Venice, and more recently Switzerland and Canada.

Put another way, when religious patterns were strong and varied, peace was difficult to maintain. But it was more likely if a government endorsed a dominant religious view, or permitted tolerance and protected minorities where no religion was dominant, especially if religious feelings were not intense. Put a third way, religion and peace were compatible if religion was strong but uncontested or contested but no longer strong. (Melko 1973: 72-73, 119; and Weigel, et al. 1981: 158-162, and Hord 1984: 154, 161-162).

Intercivilizational conflict

Braudel, describing conflict in Grenada between Christian aristocracy and Morisco peasants, expresses a view of hostility between civilizations. “Civilizations are less malleable than societies, cruel and unforgiving, their wrath lives on. It is the fearsome face of hate, cruelty and incomprehension that we must try to see here (1976: 789).”

He thinks conflict and rebellion between civilizations might have been resolved but for this. We can find anecdotal evidence suggesting most of these in our own time. Is the Palestine controversy in the 20th and 21st centuries one of incompatible values? Only this time the minority immigrants would be the stronger party and it is members of the residing civilization that engage in guerilla tactics. Does the different World War II treatment of Japanese Americans as compared to that received by North Americans of German ancestry suggest innate hostility?

What Braudel and Spengler perceive to be innate hostility is often explained as a conflict of incompatible values that have developed over centuries, whether in civilized or pre-civilized cultures such as those of North America. Does cultural commonality eventually bring countries together? Are civilizational diasporas more likely to create conflict than intracivilizational cultural differences? The Israeli, Russian and Yugoslav cases in recent history suggest that civilizational divisions may precipitate violence, but tribal, religious and national divisions do, too. Moreover, furious wars occur between states that have no such divisions, as in the Chinese Period of Contending States or the Western general Wars of the 17th to 20th centuries, while states will make alliances with devil states from other civilizations against states in their own civilizations, as in the case of the Franco-Ottoman alliances against
the Habsburgs. Most general wars are intracivilizational, with an occasional external state intervening or being invited to join an alliance.

Setting aside the idea of innate hostility perhaps arising from incompatible values, there is another set of reasons that have been perceived as explaining intercivilizational conflict. If civilizations have developed separately, and then come together, one may have military superiority over another owing to superior technology, greater attention to military development, or civilizational pattern or phase of development. Also, notably in the encounter of the European and the American civilizations, one of the civilizations may be devastated by the impact of germs. The suddenness of the encounter might also be a factor, since a gradual development of transactions would be more likely to lead to a gradual adoption of military techniques and the development of immunity to diseases.

As for civilizational expansion, this may as well be due to the internal pattern of a civilization. It may be given to an emphasis on military power and warfare, in which case it would be more likely to dissipate its energies in intracivilizational conflicts. Was the German invasion of Russia an example of irrational civilizational expansion? Did Europe conquer the Islamic world around the Mediterranean because of different levels of military technique or organization? Is the global reach of the West a matter of different phases of civilizational development?

For suddenness of encounter, however, we probably need to go back to the 16th century. It was neither hostility nor incompatibility of values that led the Western nations to conquer in the New World, while they traded with China. It was relative power. Suddenness of encounter plus superior techniques in the expanding civilization might lead to conquest, but otherwise, techniques are likely to be assimilated by the weaker civilization. But a Time of Troubles in a period of disintegration may also lead to civilizational expansion. In short, it is likely to be the internal events and processes of one civilization rather than innate hostility or value conflicts that lead to intercivilizational conflict.

The Western conquest of the New World did involve a disparity of techniques and suddenness of encounter, but once again this is a unique example. Other examples usually involve Inner Asian attacks on settled peoples, attacks of barbarians on civilizations, attacks that involved short term suddenness and superiority of techniques. Such developments can lead to rapid conquest within civilizations such as the Napoleonic development of mass forces and focal tactics, and the German application of focal tactics to the development of panzer divisions.

The impact of religion on war may involve perceived incompatible values. The cases mentioned by Farhat-Holzman sometimes involved intercivilizational conflict, sometimes not. Since religion is usually involved in the independent origins of civilizations, its development relates to the subsequent development of civilizational patterns. On the other hand, over centuries, some civilizations become more secularized than others, and most religions experience different degrees of
secularization. So religious conflict may often involve both conflicts of values and of developmental phase. The World Trade Center disaster involved religious fanaticism directed against secular power, but also the recognition in the United States and Europe that it was not a universal Muslim attack on Christianity suggests that something had been learned from the World War Two treatment of the Japanese.

More important is the evidence of much more intracivilizational warfare than intercivilizational warfare. A review of world violent conflicts from the 1740’s to the 1970’s collected by Bouthoul and Carrere (1978) indicates that four times as many troops participated in conflicts within civilizations, as in those between civilizations (Melko 2001a: 234). A more sophisticated study, using Huntington’s civilizations, find that for the period 1816-1992, states in the same civilization were more likely to fight each other than were states in different civilizations (Henderson and Tucker 2001).

Where civilizations are adjacent to one another, value incompatibility seems to be less important than systemic factors. In the case of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Hittite civilizations in the second millennium BCE, or Russia, Islam and the West (if you consider Russia either Byzantine or an independent civilization), the states of one civilization were drawn into the conflicts of the state system of another—the Hittites and Egyptians into Mesopotamian conflicts, the Seljuks and Ottomans into Byzantine or Russian as well as Western conflicts, and the Russians into conflicts of the West. Western attacks on Russia from the 17th to the 20th century had little to do with ideology, much to do with the perception of Russia as a marchland participant in the state system and from the eighteenth century as one of the five great European powers, regardless of its civilization.

Both empires and state systems have been subject to external attack, from another civilization, or from nomadic societies, or from their own barbarians. Explosively expanding civilizations, like Islam and the West, have intervened in others, sometimes providing an imperial government, as in South Asian, Andean and Mesoamerican Civilizations (which Toynbee terms an imported alien universal state) or on at least one occasion, in 19th Century Africa, dividing control among several states. Powerful nomadic groups, particularly from Central Asia, but also from Europe and North Africa, have attacked East Asian, South Asian, Mesopotamian, Islamic and Western Civilizations. Invariably their conquests have been short lived, and if they succeed in establishing a new dynasty, it soon becomes Sinified, Hinduized or Islamicized.

The same is true if the attacking groups are the civilization’s own barbarians, as in the case of Central Asian groups attacking China or European barbarians attacking Classical civilization. Snyder has a useful perception of the approaches imperial governments have taken in attempting to deal with problems along their frontiers. Either they confront directly—as he thinks often has been, though not always, the preferred Chinese strategy—which requires a permanent military establishment and buffer states that are likely to be recurrently trying to reestablish their independence; or they take a Byzantine approach—but also often Chinese (Ferguson and Mansbach
1996: 201)—combining diplomacy, intrigue and bribery to keep frontier powers weak or in conflict with one another, which creates permanent instability and is apt to invite external intervention; or they adopt a strategy used by India, Persia and often the West of assimilating frontier people, tolerating diversity, with the risk of losing control, bringing outside problems inside (Snyder 1999: 522-24). Each of these approaches, from the perspective of the central power, has its liabilities.

In recent centuries nomads and barbarians have lost their territories, but industrial technology may be fragile. If it should be subject to short term nuclear or long term ecological destruction, technological collapse or systemic disintegration, it might not be replaceable, and a reversion to feudal, agrarian society could occur, with a concurrent reversion to nomadic societies and barbarian fringes.

Another intercivilizational factor in conflict is the presence of members of an alien civilization in a diaspora, or a ruling position, or else the withdrawal of alien rulers. Egyptians led by Thebes drove the ruling Mesopotamian Hyksos out of the Nile Delta; the Mesopotamian Sasanians tried to drive the Romans out of the Levant and Anatolia; the South Asian Maurya drove the Classical Macedonians out of the Punjab; Islamic Saladin drove the Western Franks out of Palestine; East Asian Vietnamese and Islamic Algerians drove the Western French out of their respective lands.

Braudel (1976: 795 and elsewhere) sees expulsion of Muslim and Jewish populations as intercivilizational encounters. Does this apply to C 20 expulsions and genocides in Europe and Turkey? But there are also plenty of examples of heresy persecutions, where people belonged to the same civilization and were not identifiable by appearance, only by practice and sometimes only by belief.

Alien withdrawal can also lead to conflict within the civilization abandoned, as in the withdrawals of Britain from India and Palestine or the French from the Sudan after the World Wars. Withdrawals of policy, however, usually based on decline of power, are rare nor do they always cause conflict. Moreover the occupying alien is more frequently from the same civilization, Assyrians in Babylonia, Mamelukes in Egypt, the British in America, French and Austrians in Italy,

While the existence of a civilizational diaspora has been a cause of violence, it does not appear to have been a cause of war. There has been hostility against civilizational diaspora, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Jews in Russia and the West, and these can become subject to violent persecution. But more frequently the persecution is directed against domestic minorities, Catholics or Protestants, Shi‘ites or Sunni, African Americans, Burakumin in Japan, Untouchables in India, women everywhere.

Civilizations, then, have experienced war for more than five millennia, but while wars have been recurrent, they have usually been regional, with peace the prevailing situation in most places at most times. Similarly, while wars between states of different civilizations have occurred, they are more frequent within than between civilizations, and most civilizational borders have been peaceful most of the time.
The Turn of the Millennium

In the first half of the 20th century, the civilizational idea was seen as expanding the historical imagination. Having a comparative view, being able to compare the West to China, seeing how civilizations developed over millennia, gave the historian new perspectives on his own civilization, country, county or village.

Wars have become globalized, beginning with the European Wars of 1740-1763 which extended to South Asia and North America and greatly extended by the world wars, which were fought around the world and included great powers from Asia (China and Japan) and Byzantium (Russia). Since then the United States, the Western hegemon, has intervened in Asian, Latin American and Islamic civilizations.

As global interaction obviously increased in the 20th century, civilizations began to be perceived as parochial: initially Toynbee’s term for views that encompassed only ones own civilization. World systems analysts and world historians began to take a global view, to stress the interconnections that have existed and have been extending throughout history. Though civilizations may have had independent origins—and even this is highly debatable—they have long been interacting and as these political, economic and social interactions have increased, globalization has been taking place (Wesson 1978: 244-248, Chase-Dunn and Hall 1996: 149-199, McNeills 2003: 155-327, Wilkinson 1996a).

The twentieth century was by far the most lethal in history (Eckhardt 1992: 272-273). Probably more people were killed in war in the 20th century than in all other centuries combined. This was the result of radical advances in powered transportation that enables military forces to travel farther and faster as well as a tremendous increase in the lethality of weapons.

Technological improvements in medicine combined with organizational improvements in health care, however, also led to an increase in world population from a billion in the mid 19th century to six billion at the end of the 20th, this vast and rapid increase providing more people to kill. While warfare killed a million people a year in the world during the 20th century, population increased an average of 50 million a year.

Has economic sophistication increased the capacity for war in all civilizations? Vries (76-78) thinks that complex government tax systems and the idea of a national debt to support war are modern discoveries that make wars easier to finance. But he does not think that war is economically beneficial for a civilization since the transfer of land and resources is a zero sum game.

Civilizationally, however, the impact of the 20th century world wars has been quite varied. Western Civilization had its worst general war in history, and this expanded into several other, but not all, civilizations. East Asian Civilization experienced this war in the form of a Japanese expansion that was eventually curtailed with Western intervention, but not before two nuclear weapons were exploded in Japan. Since that war, Western powers have withdrawn from East Asia, but not before two smaller but lethal wars in Korea and Vietnam.
Since then, however, East Asia has experienced a period of impressive growth. South Asian civilization experienced some warfare between Western powers and Japan, then the withdrawal of the West and some major wars of adjustment as India and Southeast Asia emerged from centuries of Western and Islamic domination, and more recently, perhaps, the beginnings of economic growth. Byzantine Civilization experienced huge losses in the World Wars, then a long period of harsh dictatorship and military buildup, but very little internal war until the 1990's, when the breakup of the unifying Soviet Union led to some border conflicts as states attempted to establish or reestablished themselves. Islamic and African Civilizations also experienced a period of adjustment after the withdrawal of Western Civilization from colonial domination. In Islamic Civilization this has involved a series of internal wars with Western powers again involved since 1990. In Africa conflicts were mostly concerned with control of power within newly created states, including some dreadful massacres, but interstate interventions were increasing toward the turn of the century, and in neither of these civilizations is much development occurring. Latin American civilization was little involved in the world wars, but afterward it too experienced some internal civil wars with recurrent intervention from the United States, and uneven economic development.

The latter half of the century also saw the development of a vital and innovative period in literature, film, popular music, art and architecture.

From a civilizational perspective, then, the experiences of the World Wars and their aftermaths were rather different from the World Wars viewed as an event in itself. That such a tremendous general war as the World Wars did not lead to civilizational disintegration suggests that the quantity and lethality of war relates to the size and vitality of the civilization. There are times when a civilization can tolerate and even be stimulated by a great deal of war and other times, as perhaps in Africa at the turn of the millennium, when a period of chronic warfare can be civilizational debilitating if not devastating. Africa appears to be experiencing a Time of Troubles, with interstate warfare now piling on the woes of economic transition, massacre and plague. But these troubles need not last 400 years and terminate in an empire.

War can often be an indication of vitality. Growing and vibrant civilizations made war and art with equal enthusiasm and creativity. Peace can be vital too. The maintenance of long periods of peace requires luck and attention; it doesn’t just happen. On the other hand, war can also be a sign and cause of civilizational disintegration. The more elaborate a civilization is, the more difficult it is to destroy, but also the greater its capacity for destruction. As for peace, often but not always, imperial peace can come about out of weariness, a willingness to accept any governance that will end war.

But considered from a civilizational perspective, as already noted, war, like architecture, can be a sign of civilizational vitality, except that architecture usually produces a visible reward; war, destruction and death, though even destruction

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encourages architecture. Periods of disintegration produce disintegration, but if the vitality is there, revival often follows. Taxation and debt may finance war, but in the past it has been financed by governmental power to confiscate, by prosperity, by anticipation of gain from conquest. It appears to be technology and population increase more than economic sophistication that has produced the appalling twentieth century fatalities.

Would the permanent ending of war lead to other problems? Does war serve some functions that might not otherwise be met, for instance a clearing function that rid the civilization of obsolescent institutions and facilitated reconstitution? There are cases of civilizational ossification that might have been resolved by wars, but weren’t. War also provides many with opportunities they would not otherwise have had. But these positive consequences of war do not demonstrate that it is necessary for civilizational health. Civilizations and countries go for lifetimes without war, and the people of those societies do not seem to be psychologically damaged in the sense that there is evidence of cultural insanity. And often peace provides opportunity for creativity, prosperity, and improved social well-being (e.g., Melko 1973: 178-188).

There are other sources of emotional release, and in some cultures, East Asian for instance, there seems to be less need for such release. People may be more considerate of one another.

Nuclear war, on the other hand, has the capacity to devastate a civilization or civilizations to the extent that survivors might have to revert to feudal levels, with recovery requiring centuries. Yet the danger of nuclear war would seem to be permanent, since nuclear weapons exist in great quantities, the knowledge required for making them is widespread, and only nuclear war might destroy the capacity to make them. The possibilities of proliferation, once seen as a problem among states, now extends to ethnic or religious groups capable of acquiring nuclear devices and delivering them by low tech means. This will be a chronic intra and intercivilizational problem, and there will be a strong possibility of at least episodes of regional disaster comparable to or greater than major earthquakes, tidal waves or volcanic eruptions.

Following the World Wars of the 20th century, there did appear to be a global state system. The United States, in particular, intervened in the internal, diplomatic and military affairs of states in a number of other civilizations: East Asian, South Asian, Islamic. African, Mesoamerican and Andean. In the same period other Western Nations, particularly Britain and France, were withdrawing from involvement in South Asian, Islamic and African Civilizations. Nevertheless, state systems have remained in civilizations that have been free of Western colonial rule, and reappeared in civilizations from which they withdrew. It remains to be seen whether their internal histories will not be more dynamic and involving while the global connections remain more tenuous.

In the sixties, the decade of the Cuban Missiles Crisis, it still appeared that the world might be teetering on the edge of a major nuclear war, and a probable regression to feudalism, or the domination of the world by one of the “superpowers,” the
competitors for hegemony, and a de facto imperium. At that time, therefore, there was particular interest in situations that led to imperial systems, or to civilizational collapse, and of course, the signs were easy to find.

The emergence of a global state by federation has no historical precedent, however, and seems unlikely. The conquest of all by a single state is always possible but unlikely to endure. The technology for control may be greater but the territory to be controlled exceeds anything ever controlled by an empire before, and the capabilities for resistance are greater as well as the knowledge of alternate and better forms of government, which were not always apparent in the periods of rule of the more enlightened emperors of Rome, Persia or China.

But in the last few decades of the twentieth century, even though capacities for world destruction were greater than they were in the sixties, fear of imminent catastrophe declined. We seemed to be well established in normal times (Melko 1990: 9-11, Melko and Wilkinson 1992). It is not surprising, therefore, that we were again concerned with the state system as an ongoing phenomenon, and that Huntington should be asking who would be the rivals for power, or that a collision of Chinese and American aircraft in 2001 should produce weeks of meticulous analysis.

Then, however, in rapid succession the destruction of the World Trade Towers in New York by Islamic terrorists followed by the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq led by the American hegemon and by the emergence of North Korea as a verbally aggressive East Asian nuclear power, returned perceptions in those civilizations, the three underlined by Huntington, to something like those at the time of the Cuban Missiles crisis 40 years before. Would this 21st Century crisis have been less critical if the terrorists had been Eastern European, the threatening dictator Scandinavian and the nuclear power Western European?

Blaha argues that terrorism is the weapon of the weak, has been used many times in intracivilizational situations, e.g., against Nazi’s within Germany, or against governments, as in the Philippines. What is new, he thinks, is its use against innocent civilians in the U.S. and Israel, and now, Iraq. He thinks this will harden national responses (2002: 2-3).

There is a question about civilian innocence in both these cases, since civilians presumably support governments, agreeing to settlements in Israel, and working for international policies that are perceived even by Americans to undermine the poor in other countries, usually other civilizations. Then too, civilians have often suffered from war, famously in the Thirty Years and Peloponnesian Wars. What may be new is contemporary concern about civilian populations.

Huntington’s interesting and controversial projections concerning intercivilizational encounters perceive the polar rivalry between the Western United States and the Byzantine Soviet Union as being replaced by intercivilizational wars involving Byzantium and the West opposing Islamic and East Asian civilizations. In 1996 he perceived civilizational border wars already occurring in the Philippines, East Timor,
Tibet, Tajikistan, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Chechnya, Yugoslavia and Sudan. These were conflicts involving Muslims, Hindus, and Orthodox and Western Christians, Muslims vs. Christians being the most common.

He noted, also, a number of intercivilizational conflicts between Islamic forces in the Middle East and South Asia, supporting his perception that Islam is itself especially combative, both within and without. This, he suggests, stems from pressure from increasing Muslim population, a legacy of vast conquest, the merger of religion and politics making adaptation more difficult, and the lack of a focal great power at the core of the civilization (1996: 238-261).

Blaha's durational approach provides a somewhat longer range. This leads him to believe there will be a period of growth in East Asian, South Asian, Byzantine and Islamic civilizations, and this will mean the maintenance of peace until 2050, as these civilizations expand and become more powerful, though the dominance of the declining United States will keep them from major conflict. But by 2100 all these civilizations will be in times of troubles, and this confluence does not seem to be a happy portent (2002: 129-130).

It remains to be seen whether the border conflicts Huntington describes are the result of Islamic patterns or of Western and Byzantine withdrawal. The wars on the Pacific islands, along the Russian border or in Yugoslavia can hardly be blamed on Islam. And, until the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, from an Islamic perspective this had been a matter of intercivilizational encounter only from Western incursions by the United States, Britain and France and by the creation of Israel, a Western-Byzantine-Mesopotamian incursion. Attacks on civilians in New York and Washington, Madrid and London in 2001-2005 appear to be the first major intercivilizational conflict between Islamic and Western forces occurring outside Islamic Civilization.

The hijacking of civilian planes as weapons and the widespread use of suicide bombers by terrorists, and terrorism itself, however repellant, may be seen from a more distant perception as innovations of technologically weaker groups. The attacks in the United States and Europe were intercivilizational, to be sure, but it was clear that these did not involve inevitable hostility between the Christian and Islamic religions. Rather, they were attacks of extraordinary magnitude by extreme groups, but otherwise not very different from the attack of extreme secularists from the same civilization on Black Churches in America, by one Christian group on another in Ireland, or one Muslim group on another in Iraq.

Conflicts between groups from different civilizations are not difficult to find in history. Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Hittite states struggled for centuries over Palestine and Syria. The Persian and Punic Wars were intercivilizational conflicts. The Ottomans and Habsburgs were long at odds over the Balkans. Islamic civilization long harassed India from Persia and Afghanistan, and Islamic-Hindu conflicts continue until the present day. Islamic and Byzantine civilizations were frequently in conflict, and still are along Russia’s southern border and along the Adriatic. Byzantine Civilization and its Russian
extension have recurrently battled Western states. Western, Byzantine and Islamic civilizations fought bitterly in the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

Are these conflicts different, however, from other great power conflicts? France has often been in conflict with Britain and Germany and allied with Russia or the Ottomans, while the Ottomans have fought the Mamelukes and Savafids, and the Assyrians the Babylonians. The Peloponnesian Wars, the continuous series of South Asian wars, the wars among changing great powers of Africa, the series of general wars in the West, these and many more have been intracivilizational wars.

Moreover, civilizations have been at peace. South and East Asia are rarely at War. Relations between monarchs of Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria and the Mitanni and Hittite kingdoms were often cordial. The Sassanians and East Romans had long periods of peace. The United States has behaved as a hegemon with regard to Latin America, often resented but rarely at war. The Cold War was an intercivilizational peace. Huntington says in the post cold war period, expect problems and conflicts of civilizational identity, which may be unifying (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) or divisive (Azerbaijan-Armenia or Yugoslavia) (1996: 125-130).

Regarding intercivilizational alliances, civilizations have not allied in the past, only states. In the World Wars, the Axis alliance involved two civilizations, the Allies three, but Western and East Asian civilizations were involved on both sides.

As for conflicts between Islamic states or factions, many aspects of Huntington’s argument concerning a Western-Islamic war, published in 1996 (216-217), look pretty consistent with the view of the Bush administration in 2003-2004. At the end of the last century, two fundamentalist states, Iran and Sudan, and three non-fundamentalist states, Iraq, Syria and Libya, supported by Islamicist organizations and financed in part by Saudi Arabia were opposing Israel, the United States, and other Western states. It was a limited conflict, with clandestine terrorism employed on one side, and air power, covert action and economic means on the other. More Westerners had been killed by 1996 in these conflicts than in the Gulf war of 1990-1991 and, of course, many more Islamic people had been killed.

But, was this a continuation of the cold war, this time against Islam rather than Byzantium? The cold war was hardly a war; it was a series of limited actions following a general war. As of today, it is difficult to tell whether this has changed. Were the terrorist acts, however atrocious, a series of violent actions perceived to be effective against greater power? Was the invasion of Iraq like the intervention in Vietnam, the act of a hegemon attempting to control a perceived great power expansion? That is what hegemons usually attempt to do within civilizations, but also beyond when they have the power.

As for the world economic crisis that began in 2008, this is too recent and unexpected to assess. The abandonment of Keynesian economics in the 1980s may have been a factor. Our collective civilizational perspectives were certainly no help in predicting its onset. Its impact on war and peace is not yet apparent. In the past, as noted above,
the correlation between economic prosperity and peace has been weak. That depression contributed to the resumption of the world wars, and prosperity supported their termination, is obviously worth noting, but this does not require the wisdom of a civilizationist.

Even in a period of greater global interaction, civilizational perceptions offer another perspective on the nature and possibilities of war and peace. Such perceptions, however, do not provide certitude in predicting the future or making policy decisions.

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