

War Through the Ages: Humanity's Eternal Dance with War

Throughout the annals of history, humanity has endured an unbroken chain of strife, conflict, and war. Not a single epoch has been spared from the specter of discord and violence.

Consider a multi-generational family unit, with a grandfather, son, and grandson. Across the span of their lives, it is nearly inevitable that at least one generation will bear witness to the ravages of war. Whether within the confines of their own nation, amidst regional tensions, or in the far reaches of the globe, the echoes of conflict persist incessantly. War, it seems, remains an enduring facet of human existence, ceaselessly unfolding across the tapestry of time.

Illusion 1: War is Incompatible with Human Nature

The notion that war is solely a consequence of divine retribution, human fallibility, or systemic flaws in the international order, and therefore an aberration, is deeply flawed. In reality, war is an intrinsic aspect of human existence, shaped by the evolution of cultural civilization. It is rooted in the very essence of human nature, representing an instinctual response to various stimuli.

Central to discussions about the origins of war are human factors. Presently, the discourse on human aggressiveness remains polarized between two schools of thought: conservatism, which views aggression as an innate human trait, and liberalism, which attributes it entirely to environmental and societal influences.

The history of warfare parallels the trajectory of humanity itself. The theological narrative traces the genesis of human violence to the biblical tale of Cain's murder of Abel, portraying the inception of conflict within the microcosm of a four-person family. However, the earliest documented "civilized" conflict, occurring in 1479 BC at the Battle of Kadesh near Megiddo in Syria between the Syrians and Egyptians, marks the advent of organized warfare. Preceding this event are epochs of prehistoric conflicts and battles.

Anthropologists have found invaluable insights into the nature of war through observation of groups such as the New Guineans, Australian Aborigines, North American Indians, Alaskan Eskimos, and Yanomamo, who have maintained traditional lifestyles detached from mainstream civilization. These societies attest to war's innate presence in human existence. Contrary to Rousseau's idealism, these groups corroborate Hobbes' assertion that war is inherent to human nature.

Interestingly, among these peoples, alongside their inherent aggressiveness, conflicts often manifest in ritualized forms. Groups would assemble on open fields, engaging in prolonged displays of intimidation and posturing, often concluding without significant casualties.

In summary, war is not an anomaly but an enduring facet of human existence, deeply ingrained in our nature and cultural evolution.

The notion that primitive societies engaged in more brutal warfare than civilized nations is an illusion. In 1638, the English's violent tactics during their battle with the Narragansetts shocked the Indians. The English commander rationalized this by pointing out the Indians' strategic restraint: "Otherwise the Indians could have fought for 7 years without killing even 7 men." Such prolonged engagements without significant casualties are inconceivable in today's conflicts.

Observing prehistoric groups, it becomes evident that Greek warfare, the cradle of Western military tradition, initially served basic, primitive needs. These early conflicts, often termed "farmers' wars," revolved around disputes over resources like olives, grapes, and wheat. They were characterized by low intensity compared not only to modern warfare but even to later periods in classical Greece. The scale of conflict seemed to correlate with the simplicity of human needs, resulting in fewer sacrifices.

However, the era of classical Greece witnessed a transformation. Grand ideological concepts propelled warfare to unprecedented scales, ushering in sophisticated and efficient forms of violence. The Greek ethos and philosophical underpinnings provided the impetus for large-scale battles like Marathon. Primitive needs alone would not have justified such monumental conflicts.

During the classical Greek period, the majority of casualties in battles occurred during the chaotic retreats known as "On the stampede." Fear and panic among soldiers led to the trampling of comrades in the scramble to escape. Such scenes are absent in modern organized armies, highlighting the evolution of military discipline and tactics over time.

As mankind's economic capabilities expanded and new ideas emerged, warfare underwent a parallel evolution from the Greek hoplite to the legions of the future.

During the Roman Republic, warfare reached its zenith in terms of scale and lethality. Rome boasted an army numbering half a million at its peak. However, during periods of economic decline, the number of soldiers dwindled to 5-10 thousand, accompanied by a decrease in the frequency of wars.

The Renaissance, often hailed as an era of rediscovery in philosophy and art, also marked a resurgence in the understanding of war and its manifestations. Wars played a pivotal role in shaping the Renaissance. Without the battles of Marathon and Salamis, Greek civilization, along with the philosophical contributions of Plato and Aristotle, might not have existed. Similarly, the battles of Tours (732 AD) and Lekhi (955 AD) laid the groundwork for the Renaissance.

Between World Wars I and II, considerable interest emerged in researching the root causes of war. In 1932, Einstein and Freud exchanged famous letters addressing this issue. They both posited that human instincts of aggressiveness and destruction underpinned the causes of war. Einstein suggested that inherent human nature harbors instincts of hatred and destruction, while Freud identified a "killing instinct" manifesting as suicide. Drawing from observations of fish and birds, Konrad Lorenz concluded that aggressiveness is a genetic component shared by all living beings, including humans. This perspective resonates with the biblical notion that "the heart of man is inclined to evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21), echoing the argument that war originates from human nature.

The argument of the origin of war from human nature was opposed by the idea of human morality, although moral obligations in many cases are themselves the motivator of war, for example in the form of humanitarian intervention. So in both cases the cause of war lies in human nature.

Man's pursuit of his objectives through force, such as warfare, often leads to attributions of such violent behavior to the divine. The Bible depicts the full range of war in this context, illustrating a gradual escalation of violence until the desired outcome is achieved. Initially, God issues warnings to figures like Pharaoh, who defy divine will by refusing to permit the Jews passage. As these warnings go unheeded, the intensity of divine intervention increases until the goal is realized.

Consider the account of the tenth plague in Egypt, where God commands the death of every firstborn, from Pharaoh's palace to the humblest dwelling, as recounted in Exodus 12:29-30: "At midnight the Lord killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead."

Such acts may be perceived as superhuman, even inhuman, in their severity. Yet, they underscore a fundamental aspect of human nature: the inclination towards conflict and violence, even within religious narratives.

Humans are deeply invested in the emotions evoked by war, encompassing themes of life and death, victory and defeat. Such emotional intensity has been immortalized in epics like the Iliad and Odyssey, passed down orally through generations before Homer penned them.

Primitive art reflects humanity's struggle against both human and animal adversaries, illustrating how war fulfills spiritual and aesthetic needs. The legendary clashes between figures like Achilles and Hector are not just about human emotions but also serve as theatrical spectacles, captivating audiences with applause-worthy drama.

Throughout history, battles were strategically positioned for maximum spectator visibility. The Battle of Agincourt in 1415 and the first Battle of Bull Run in 1816 drew crowds eager to witness the spectacle of combat.

Even in modern times, wars and battles attract live spectators. Sports, too, echo the primal instincts of war, from ancient gladiatorial games to contemporary competitions like wrestling, boxing, and hand-to-hand combat. Games such as football, basketball, and rugby evoke national pride, often mirroring the euphoria of victory in war.

Though illusory, this sense of victory reflects the enduring emotional connection to ancient and medieval battles.

In the 21st century, our fascination with battle extends beyond physical arenas. Through cinema and the virtual world, we engage with scenes of violence more intensely than ever before. The passion we invest in these virtual conflicts underscores the inherent link between human nature's violent components and the production of war.

It's impossible to evade human instincts through religio-political doctrines. Ultimately, these instincts led to the victory of Homo sapiens over Neanderthals in prehistoric times, securing exclusive dominion over the earth. Our survival instincts, rooted in natural conflict, are integral to our existence. While we may wish to avoid harsh realities, escape is futile; our only chance lies in confronting these truths rather than trying to evade them

Illusion 2: There is no place for wars in the modern age

Today, many hold the unreasonable belief that we are living in a unique era—the "special era" of the 21st century, perhaps the final stage of human development. Some argue that we have either reached or are just a small step away from achieving harmonious coexistence and universal agreement on Earth. Consequently, they dismiss the violent wars of the past as irrelevant to the present and unlikely to occur in the future—we can almost guarantee it. This leads to the illusion that we reside in a peaceful era free from wars.

It is a mistake to assume that our era is unparalleled in terms of progressive achievements, suggesting that we have overcome primitive human instincts and reached the peak of moral and humane development. This perspective stems from a limited understanding of the past and, more significantly, a lack of thorough analysis.

For many, the "XXI century" does not simply mark another stage in the continuity of civilization or consistent development. Instead, it is perceived as a transition to an entirely new dimension, as if the XXI century carries with it the obligation and opportunity to "change human nature." However, this euphoric sense of epochal uniqueness is not exclusive to our era; throughout history, nearly every era has been viewed in such a manner.

The Age of Enlightenment fostered a belief that the evolution of civilization implied the eradication of violence from society. Consequently, the subject of war was largely sidelined from political and social thought. For a significant duration, until Emile Durkheim, prominent sociologists overlooked war as a significant and problematic issue for their studies, firmly convinced that the future held inherent peace.

The Yanomamo, a population of 10,000 dwelling in the jungles of Brazil and Venezuela, were cut off from civilization and held the illusion of a unique development.

Upon their discovery, they appeared as a truly primitive society, marked by elements of animalistic violence. Warfare among themselves was considered a natural and ordinary occurrence. Anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon conducted a study of this primitive world in 1964. After spending several months living among the Yanomamo and drawing numerous valuable conclusions, Chagnon observed that these primitive people regarded themselves as the most peaceful and perfect species ever to inhabit the Earth. They believed their reality was "progressive" and "uniquely developed." However, this perception was evidently an illusion of the Yanomamo.

The belief that one's era will eliminate the DNA of war, struggle, and violence from human nature is a profound illusion. It often results in a complete disregard for the lessons of the past, neglecting to study them, which in turn sets the stage for catastrophic mistakes and defeats in the future.

Today, there exists a prevailing illusion that military conflict, even in its large-scale and brutal form, is a thing of the past—dead and gone. However, the reality is starkly different. War persists and thrives, thanks to the advancement of civilization, becoming increasingly potent, destructive, and bloody.

Due to the unique characteristics of our era—defined by digital technologies, the Internet, and social networks—the prevalent illusion is not unlike that of the 19th century. During that time, the advent of the railway and telegraph sparked predictions of diminished warfare in the modern world and its eventual eradication. In 1858, the laying of the transatlantic telegraph cable connecting Europe and the Americas

was hailed as a miraculous achievement, leading people to believe that the threat of war had been relegated to the past. The initial messages sent through this cable, celebrating "peace that has mercy on men," seemed entirely natural. However, much like digital technology and the Internet today, the telegraph was primarily utilized for military purposes, contributing to the expansion and intensification of conflicts alongside the railway.

The period following World War I is often referred to as the age of illusory peace, largely due to the failure to recognize the necessity of action to prevent World War II. However, even without the looming specter of World War II, the aftermath of World War I did not usher in the peace envisioned. In reality, the interwar period was marred by numerous hostilities. From 1918 to 1939, a span of 21 years, over 40 wars erupted, including interstate conflicts, civil wars, and military uprisings such as the Russo-Georgian War, the Estonian War for Freedom, the Lithuanian War for Freedom, the Russian-Polish War, the Spanish Civil War, the Nicaraguan Civil War, the Chinese Civil War, the Turkey-Greece War, the Italy-Ethiopia War, among others. It is untenable to consider this period an era of peace when over 40 wars, some lasting several years, occurred within just 21 years.

Between 1945 and the turn of the 21st century, we've faced a challenging reality: the Cold War era stands out as one of the bloodiest periods in human history. During this time span, over 120 military conflicts erupted, resulting in more than 60 million casualties. Despite these staggering numbers, a sense of peace prevailed, largely due to the overshadowing threat of nuclear war dominating military strategic thinking. The fear of nuclear conflict was so pervasive that other forms of military engagements seemed insignificant in comparison.

The 20th century wasn't the only epoch marked by global conflict; even today, the world map can be divided into three distinct categories: regions actively engaged in warfare, areas on the brink of conflict, and zones enjoying relative peace. Hence, our era isn't truly exceptional in its quest to "end war," let alone addressing the root causes of conflict.

In reality, human progress hasn't diminished or weakened the essence of warfare; instead, it has refined the forms and methods of military conflicts and violence. History demonstrates that, among various catalysts, progressive ideologies and the relentless pursuit of these ideals often trigger wars, with conflicts serving as platforms for the realization of these ideas.

Illusion 3: International trade eliminates war

Born out of industrial Manchester, the notion of replacing war with trade fostered a profound illusion: that heightened commerce between nations and states would entirely extinguish the desire and necessity for conflict. During this period, the activities of the British India Trading Company were dismissed as antiquated and irrelevant. Sadly, the prescient observation of Jan Pieterszoon Kuhn, an early architect of Dutch trading dominance in Indochina, went largely unheeded: trade cannot exist without war, just as war cannot be conceived without trade.

The construction of the Suez Canal epitomizes this dynamic. Completed in the late 19th century, it swiftly became a flashpoint for conflict, with the Egyptian war erupting in 1882, fought both over and through the strategic waterway. This trend persisted into the 20th century, notably in 1956 when the canal ignited the Israeli-Egyptian war. The fallacy of quelling conflict through international trade directly precipitated numerous wars, including the Opium War in China from 1839 to 1842. Similarly, the advocacy for an 'open

door policy' in trade fueled the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901, setting China against the Eight Powers Coalition.

Illusion 4: The threat of nuclear confrontation precludes the possibility of conventional wars

Strategic thinking fostered the misconception that in the era of weapons of mass destruction, conventional warfare was gradually losing its significance. However, it remains insufficiently acknowledged that nuclear arms have not proven to be a deterrent against conventional conflicts. In fact, all nuclear powers have engaged in conventional wars: the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the United States in Korea and Vietnam, England in the Falklands, France in Algeria, India against Pakistan, and China against Vietnam. Moreover, coalitions of nuclear powers participated in conflicts such as the Persian Gulf and Yugoslav wars, while Russia engaged in conflicts with Georgia and Ukraine.

Remarkably, two nuclear superpowers suffered defeat in conventional wars: the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the United States in Vietnam. Thus, the belief that nuclear weapons would diminish overall warfare, prevent major powers from initiating conventional conflicts, deter nuclear-armed nations from engaging in warfare, and render them invincible against non-nuclear adversaries has proven illusory.

A coherent perspective emerged from the non-nuclear Soviet military doctrine of 1946, asserting that "the atomic bomb may terrify those with weak nerves, but it cannot determine the outcome of a war."

Illusion 5: Women in government reduce the possibility of military conflict

You often hear the notion that having women in leadership positions or involved in state governance reduces the likelihood of military conflicts due to their perceived less aggressive nature. However, this belief is illusory, as history provides numerous counter-examples. Figures like Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, Joan of Arc.

Even during the era when this idea gained popularity, the actions of leaders like Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, and Margaret Thatcher challenged its validity. All three were involved in military operations, with Golda Meir presiding over the Yom Kippur War, one of the bloodiest conflicts in Israeli history. She personally approved the assassination of the organizers of the Munich terror attacks. Indira Gandhi, besides engaging in war, curtailed human rights and freedoms in India for an extended period.

Margaret Thatcher's tenure included controversial decisions such as initiating the Falklands War over a small territory thousands of kilometers away from London, a move unlikely by her predecessors or successors. Her policy regarding the hunger strike of Irish prisoners, leading to fatalities, remains unprecedented in modern democracy. These examples underscore that the assumption of women in leadership roles inherently preventing military conflicts is unfounded.

Illusion 6: At the current stage of development, military actions are more "humane"

Modernity often fosters the illusion that wars fought in our era are considerably more humane compared to those of the past—be it medieval, ancient, or prehistoric. However, a closer examination of the dynamics of combat reveals a consistent pattern: humanity continuously seeks to streamline the process of destruction for the aggressor. In earlier times, people grappled with their innate violent tendencies, often hindered by internal moral considerations.

Richard Gabriel's observations of the New Guinea aborigines vividly illustrate this point. While proficient at shooting arrows for hunting, they deliberately feathered the arrow ends in war situations to minimize casualties, resulting in inaccurate shots. Similarly, certain American Indian groups prioritized ceremonial hand touches over lethal combat during battles. Greek battles, despite their chaos, inflicted most casualties due to disorder rather than intentional violence. Even in the age of medieval chivalry, battles often resembled sporting competitions more than brutal clashes.

The advent of artillery marked a shift where casualties primarily resulted from long-range bombardment rather than close combat. Even with the introduction of firearms, efforts were made to mitigate cruelty. Remarkably, after the infamous Gettysburg battle, 90% of rifles recovered from the field remained loaded and unfired, with half having been loaded just once—reflecting a reluctance to engage in direct violence.

It is a fallacy to assume that less technologically advanced societies of the past were inherently more cruel than contemporary times. Technological and educational advancements haven't inherently made us more humane. In the era of sword-wielding warriors, confronting an enemy face-to-face demanded significant psychological preparation to unleash violent tendencies. Today's technological prowess enables a soldier to carry out destructive acts remotely, with minimal physical and psychological exertion, akin to routine tasks like pressing a button during an 8-hour workday.

The humanity of a war isn't solely measured by its casualty count but also by the moral toll it exacts on those perpetrating destruction. Technological progress hasn't curbed human instincts of violence but has, in many ways, exacerbated them.

Illusion 7: Modern wars are short-term

One prevailing illusion of the 21st century arises from the concept of a "global village." It's as if the world has accelerated and condensed due to technological advancements and improved communication, leading to the belief that any war, unlike those in the past, will inevitably be brief, swift, and with fewer casualties. This notion is often supported by the argument that prolonged wars entail significant expenses and are economically unwise.

This illusion isn't new; it already existed at the dawn of the 20th century. The conditions before the First World War provided ample grounds for such arguments. Breakthroughs in telegraphy, railways, and logistics, including innovations like canned food, enabled troops to move and maneuver at unprecedented speeds and scales. The Schlieffen Plan, built on these principles, fostered the illusion that even a large-scale war would conclude within a few months.

Moreover, the economic theory proposed by Angel Norman further bolstered this belief. According to his theory, military conflicts are economically unprofitable, and once this fact is fully recognized, wars would cease. Consequently, any war that did occur would inevitably be brief due to its financial impracticality. With Schlieffen's emphasis on technological speed and Norman's economic theories, humanity entered World War I with the deep conviction that it would be a matter of a few months, only to find itself engulfed in a conflict that lasted for years.

There was considerable anticipation surrounding contemporary warfare, especially due to technological and economic factors, with expectations that conflicts like those in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria would swiftly conclude. However, reality didn't align with these expectations. While political resolutions may have been proposed long ago, the actual state of war persisted in each case. The illusion of rapid warfare

in the 21st century was largely shaped by the Gulf War of 1990-91, which, in fact, represented only one phase of an ongoing conflict—the campaign. The subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003 marked another stage of this protracted war.

This illusion of swift warfare can be traced back to the "Vietnam syndrome." The prolonged Vietnam War left the American military, political, and civil society deeply disillusioned, necessitating a new military engagement to dispel the myth of perpetual conflict. Amidst various other factors, the primary objective shifted from merely expelling Hussein's forces from Kuwait to swiftly concluding the entire process. Consequently, while the war with Hussein's regime remained unresolved, the illusion of a rapid and decisive conflict emerged.

Illusion 8: Democracies are Averse to War

War is an enduring aspect of human history, evolving alongside humanity itself. The notion that democracies engage in fewer wars compared to autocratic or non-democratic regimes gained traction during the 20th century, particularly amidst the backdrop of the Cold War. However, empirical evidence contradicts this notion. Between 1945 and 2000, democratic nations undertook more frequent and larger military interventions.

This trend is not surprising given that democracies bear international responsibilities to uphold peace, maintain international order, safeguard fundamental human rights and freedoms, and address global challenges. In many instances, fulfilling these obligations necessitates the use of military force. Even today, the democratic world is heavily involved in conflicts across Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Conversely, undemocratic regimes typically refrain from large-scale military operations, engaging instead in rhetorical threats and military demonstrations, with open military engagements being rare exceptions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pervasive illusions surrounding war, whether rooted in perceptions of human nature or institutional ideologies, coalesce into a singular misconception: that war is a relic of bygone eras. However, ongoing discussions within military and academic circles underscore the evolving nature of warfare and its potential trajectories in the future. These dialogues occur amidst the backdrop of active military conflicts and careful observation thereof.

The historical tapestry of warfare unequivocally demonstrates that our societies, institutions, and even our legal frameworks have been shaped by the exigencies of war. Indeed, war has been an intrinsic and transformative force that has birthed republics and democracies alike. For instance, the genesis of liberal democracies like Germany and modern Japan can be directly traced back to wartime contexts. Thus, wars of the past transcend mere episodes of violence or dark historical memories; rather, they represent pivotal moments in the dynamic evolution of humanity, inexorably intertwined with human nature itself.

