

Old History, Dumb Ideals

by Bob Neumann

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Reading history leaves a bitter taste.
¿Endless wars, violent deaths — and for what?
The long dead passions that stirred
Thousands to arms, have a hollow ring.
¿Don't we make war for so much better reasons?
We know so much more than they did,
We are far more educated and informed.
Half of science and engineering has been discovered
In my lifetime — the pundits say.
Yet, I doubt future readers of history
— if we survive war —
Will cut us much slack.
They will simply say, as we do of the past:
“Silly, silly reasons
Thousands lay dead.
And for what?
Was that war necessary?”

We fought two world wars in the 20 century,
With hideous losses of life, wealth and material.
Tens of million lives lost, though to quote Stalin:
“A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic.”
Of course, we also had at least 200 minor wars
We barely notice in the history books.
We all sort of agree with Einstein's logic,
A nuclear third world war is probably MAD.
Though Mutual Assured Destruction was official
U.S.'s, Russia's and now China's policy, and
sort-of-still-is!
Beguiling small international incidents
have too often large unintended results.
Think World War I, which unmade Europe, kings and
empires,
From the assassination of a visiting Archduke in a foreign
land.
Yet, we war on — we make necessary wars — others small

foolish wars,
While the missiles in their silos await the code words.
Prepping for, or making war, is still a major gambit for
nations.

A war bias that is simply argued:
“You can’t change human nature.
We have always warred.”

But one dreary day in the near, near future,
Some bright nerd or nerdelle will invent
A new super-type explosive device,
Say only one-tenth the power of ye old hydrogen type.
But, to the delight of terrorists and poor countries,
An explosive cheap and easy to make.
The Model T, if you will,
That will nuclearize in deadliness
The weakest among us,
Fighting “homo-sapiens.”
¿Then ... then what?

When we have the next generation
Of super cheapie bang bangs,
We’ll be able to destroy
Far, far faster
Than we can rebuild or rebirth.
Historically we’ve done it before!
It’s called the Dark Ages,
After the glories of Rome and Greece.
This is but one big, sad example
Of our capacity to self-destruct.

If you agree this day is coming,
Then all wars, not just nuclear ones,
Are probably getting too dangerous for civilization.
We have to work out this war thing
We’re so deeply addicted to.

In a historic sense we all kinda know this.
We are all so much better informed,
With so much knowledge at our fingertips.
Yet, year by year, we prepare or “do” war,
Spending billions of our tax money and blood.
¿For what? ¿On what?
Do they make any more sense than 17th century wars?

“Oh, you can’t change human nature.
Man has always warred. We can’t change!”
Yet, historically we have made profound changes
On how we organize ourselves politically and socially.
Slavery has been banished and has almost vanished.
The rule of god-ordained Kings is mostly gone.
A world of colonial empires vanished in my lifetime.
The old ideas of born-to-a-class, born-to-rule-others,
Born-to-serve, make little sense to us today.
Yet all these for 30 or 40 centuries of recorded history
Were argued as basic to human nature and God’s law!
They were needed to maintain civilization — essential.
We are only newly free from these conventions.
Freed we created a wealth of knowledge and toys.
Knitted by globalization and instant communications,
We have loosely banned together in the League and UN.
But are stilled stymied by the sovereignty of any nation
To act as they will — to war almost as they will —
Against other nations, against their own people.
We are almost helpless before a myriad of planet problems.
Yet, we hobble along with 195 armed, fighting nations,
And a United Nations that usually can’t act — only discuss.

There’s gotta be another way
There *has* to be another way
There has to be a *better* way.
But we have not demanded it,
Even to ourselves!

We are very conservative in even thinking
About other ways we might organize,
Say, into a world government
That might end war-making,
Partially by making war illegal,
As we do now within a nation,
By severely limiting local military power.
A world government would
Give us a better shot at handling
Global warming, ecological destruction, etc., etc.
Example: set international standards and enforcements
To decrease carbon emissions now.
But, but you can always argue
That there are no scientific social-engineering books,
Or nice mathy socio-political formulas to use!
Politically, if it sorta works, don't touch it.
Age reveres our, our government to all conservative souls.
We would not tolerate a new 1938 car or 1938 telephone,
Or what passed then for medicine and science-technology.
But, we know so little on how to make government work,
Especially democratically, or just usefully autocratically.
That what is uniquely ours
Is just the bestest there is!

So, like the proverbial lemmings,
We follow our leaders
Along the ancestral paths
Trotted by our noble forefathers
Who created this social order,
For our unique, sovereign nation.
And, making war is just
A regular part of our lives.
After all, most nations
Have been formed by wars past.
We don't like war,
But we don't shun it.

Like slaughter houses for animals,
We munch our steak and crispy chicken,
And declare it a necessary evil
That we can't can't change!

¿Or can we? Or more worrisome, ¿Must we?

Profound changes in warfare are coming,
We face immense world-wide problems,
We need to start thinking about world government
That has power far beyond a United Nations.
A federated system
With certain power reserved to a world body.
War-making, for example,
The maintenance of armies and weapons,
A universal bill of rights and duties,
Like world taxes and a draft,
Etc., etc.
A constitutional convention
Would have to hammer out what is needed,
What is possible at that moment in time.
Give our ignorance
On building governmental thing-a-ma-bobs
That work and work well,
A world government needs a sunshine clause:
Once every 25 years a worldwide vote
On some part of the basic constitution.
Rejection: call again a constitutional convention
To refashion the order and basic laws,
Perhaps eliminate the inevitable dross,
Then call on the voters to unite behind the changes.

A world constitution should renounce
The use of warfare,
Use non-violent intervention,

Ala King and Gandhi
To enforce world law.

The individual, not nation states,
Should be held responsible
For breaking world law.
World marshals and world courts
Could and would handle most problems.
But we are a hideous war-making breed
With long historical cultures of violence
Perhaps genetically based.
There will be violent outbreaks
Like a Darfur or a petty tyrant,
A righteous group of millions
Who will require armed might to subdue.

To enforce world laws
World armies should lead
With non-violence.
Unarmed draftees,
White-haired peace warriors
Should lead forth
To persuade the violent
To yield to world marshals and world courts.
Peace warriors with a lifetime
Of experience and practical knowledge
To push constantly — perhaps for decades —
To force the recalcitrant.

Behind the unarmed peace warriors
Would of necessity be a magnificent army
A moveable fortress
That no local group or army
Could defeat or drive off;
That could shoot back with overwhelming force.
But the front line would be white haired,

White-robed, unarmed warriors
To push, to persuade with the world watching, demanding.

We have some practice in sixty years of UN interventions,
The successful occupation and government building
In Europe and Japan after WWII.
It is messy, long-term, difficult.
It could and can easily fail.
We know so little
About social-political engineering.

World Government
World Courts
Peace Warriors
World Armies
Would have to be involved for the long haul.
Compromises, broken promises, new outbreaks,
Failure of men and leaders, failure of laws.
We have much to learn about peace-keeping,
About the basic rules of governing!

Perhaps we must start with a worldwide union
Of democracies
And slowly expand,
Like the European Union,
To eventually encompass the planet.

Global political parties would have to be built,
A Constitutional Convention called.
A world government would have to peacefully evolve
Using non-violence in global enforcement.

So, all we've got to do is design a world government,
A set of world laws and world courts,
All springing from a magnificent world constitution,
To end wars as we know it!

All this in the face of a world enamored.
With nation and national sovereignty,
With dozens of submerged nationals
Clamoring to form their own
“More perfect union,”
Freed from the yoke of the majority.

War-making now,
You may also argue,
Is still a non-problem
For world civilization.
Messy,
Nasty,
Perhaps pointless.
Yes, yes, but for 63 years
The nations of this little world,
Some armed to the nuclear teeth,
Have managed to fight
Probably sixty little wars
Without wrecking civilization,
Or starting a nuclear holocaust!

I can only argue lamely,
We will probably not be so lucky
In the not-so-distant future.
Fortunately we can't know the future,
The tragic interplay of fate and social forces,
Only deal with the likely probabilities.

Watching the opening of the Olympics
One is painfully aware of the number of nations,
The millions who can't communicate
Across the linguistic, cultural and political barriers,
That deeply divide our little, blue planet.
To successfully form a world government
Will be an awesome task.

We are only a little civilized.
The brutal primate
Strides beneath our skins.
We are also not as smart
As we think we are.

Nevertheless,
We've got a problem with warring,
We've got a problem with wrecking.
Our fragile planet ecologically,
With wrecking our more fragile civilization,
By warring, warring, warring,
Between, among us, *mano a mano*, by button,
Generation after generation.

One can quote a huge array,
Leaders and intellectuals pronouncements,
"Some day we'll have world government!"
Historically we are moving in that direction,
World problems demand world solutions, etc.
Ecological survival demands..., etc.
Say, in a hundred or two hundred years.
We *will* be ready!

There is a problem with "some day."
The same as in our personal lives,
We may awake that it's too late!
The time for "some day" has passed.
We're too late to do "some day."

"Some day" for world government,
After a World War III.
After a new Dark Ages
Of wars and civil destruction
Caused by new weapons,
After more decades of anarchy,

would be a sad “some day”
For world government and world laws.
If we are stupid enough,
Can we wait and wait and wait?
Wait for Godot!

We must create a world government soon,
A government that pledges not to war,
But uses techniques of Gandhi and King.
One world under a single set of laws,
Federal in nature, severely limiting,
World government to a narrow band
Of powers and responsibilities.

We need to start talking now,
Acting, pushing, demanding, organizing now.
We don't have to keep old, dumb ideals,
We don't have to repeat dumb history,
We can peacefully refashion our government.

We do have a new *how*
The Internet,
A tenuous link to organizing millions
To the problems, to the solutions.
Perhaps we need to start there.

Will we? Soon? How?
That, my reader,
Is perhaps just up to you!

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