

Does Peace Have a Price Tag?

War and Peace: Who Profits, Who Pays

It's a profitable business making components for the U.S. war machine. Just ask Howard Nash, president of Northstar Network Ltd. in St. John's. His company is working on a \$250,000 high-technology project for the American military. Nash and his employees aren't the only Canadians benefiting. Such is the demand for weaponry and the willingness to profit from it that Canada has become the sixth largest producer in the global arms trade. It's enough to make former Nobel Peace Prize winner and Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson turn over in his grave.

American officials once called Pearson the most dangerous man on earth. He had made an offer they could not, without losing face, refuse. The Americans, British and Israelis were hell bent on attacking Egypt because they feared the president of that North African nation would interfere with the flow of traffic through the Suez Canal. Pearson came up with the idea of installing peacekeepers who were independent of both sides of the dispute in between the warring parties until the situation could be resolved by dialogue. Thus began Canada's reputation as an honest broker and a peacekeeper.

Today, we are committed to a war in Afghanistan that should never have been. Imagine how different the world would be if, after the attacks on New York and the Pentagon, Osama bin Laden had been labelled a common criminal who had to be brought to justice. His al-Qaeda would have remained a rump organization rather than a rallying cry for all disaffected Muslims. The United Nations sanctioned the invasion of Afghanistan only because it had been backed into a corner. The Americans were threatening to declare the UN irrelevant and, if the world's superpower abandoned the international organization, the UN would go the way of its

predecessor, the League of Nations. The UN decided it would lose a battle and live to fight another day.

Despite its flaws, the UN had affected the behaviour of aggressive nations. Throughout the Cold War, as the West and the Soviets aggressively carved out their territories, the two blocs always felt they had to justify military interventions, usually by declaring they were being invited into a country by a government under threat from rebellious forces. Many of their actions were covert; neither side wanted to be seen to be scuttling the United Nations. The major countries from both blocs were permanent members of the powerful Security Council which, when it was formed in the aftermath of World War II, had pledged to “Never Again” allow such horrors of war.

George W. Bush and his administration unravelled whatever tapestry the United Nations had woven, however imperfectly, to reduce the chances of another world war and to mitigate the worst abuses that occur during aggressions. As belligerent as any tinpot dictator, he demanded that the entire world follow America into Iraq and Afghanistan or be regarded as siding with the terrorists. The vast economic power of the U.S. bought the support of reluctant leaders of many countries, often in the face of mass opposition from their citizens. With few exceptions, the British, for example, the coalition strung together to invade Iraq was “a coalition of the billing” as one commentator described it on CBC Radio’s program, *Dispatches*, in 2006.

The descent of Canada into a culture of war and its abandonment of its “honest broker” role in the world was spearheaded by craven leaders and corporatists who feared an economic backlash from the United States. A Pearsonian approach might have seen Canada push for an independent panel to negotiate with the Afghan government for the handover of bin Laden to face criminal charges. It would have acknowledged the concern that bin Laden would be unlikely

to get a fair trial in the U.S. and suggested it be conducted at The Hague. It would have established a commission to research the roots of the anger toward America and recommend measures to address legitimate problems. Certainly, Pearson would not have set an arbitrary deadline of three months for the handover as did Bush. Few countries, or at least their citizens, wanted war with Afghanistan and, as dependent as the world is on the economic purchasing power and investment financing of the U.S., America is dependent on countries across the globe to provide its corporations with energy, resources and cheap labour. Its deficit-running government needs cash and gets it mainly from China and Japan.

Such efforts to avert war might have been futile. By the time of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the U.S. had immersed itself in a culture of aggression. The nation had followed the destructive path that former President Dwight D. Eisenhower had warned future leaders to avoid. The military-industrial complex has become the powerful lobby that Eisenhower dreaded. The U.S. is home to the three biggest corporations in the world's \$3 trillion arms trade. It accounts for 48 per cent of the trade and is by far the largest exporter of weaponry. The federal government uses military contracting to distribute jobs to regions of America that are economically disadvantaged. The benefits ripple through the economy; armies need to be housed, fed, clothed, equipped and transported. Almost half of employed Americans work directly for the military or for a company that benefits from defence contracts. Elected representatives understandably support military initiatives in their constituencies. Overseas, the U.S. maintains over a thousand military bases in 130 countries.

The dissolution of the U.S.S.R., symbolized by the destruction of the Berlin Wall, was supposed to create a "peace dividend." Indeed, several European countries and Canada did downsize their militaries and curb their defence budgets. Not so in the remaining superpower.

During his presidency, Bill Clinton did reduce the size of the military but not the Defence budget. In a smoke and mirrors manoeuvre, his government contracted out military services to private businesses. Privatization has been blossoming ever since. After the bombing of the navy vessel, USS Cole, in Yemen, Blackwater, a company of mercenaries owned by Christian fundamentalist Erik Prince, won the contract to train navy sailors to cope with this new type of warfare and, when the U.S. invaded Iraq, the same company got lucrative contracts to provide security for civilian staff and the succession of American pro-consuls from Paul Bremer onwards. So extensive is America's privatization of war that almost half the American personnel in Iraq did not belong to the regular forces.

Then there were the lucrative contracts for rebuilding the oil pipelines and infrastructure. Halliburton was handed contracts worth billions and there was very little oversight. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been very profitable for other corporations: Kellogg, Brown & Root, Dyncorp, Louis Berger Group and Chemonics International.

If Ben Ferencz had his way, those corporations would lose their profits and taxpayers would realize the "peace dividend" that escaped their grasp in the 1980s. The former Nuremberg prosecutor, now in his eighties, has been tirelessly advocating for the rule of law to displace warfare as a means of settling disputes and punishing aggressors. He has witnessed the creation of one essential building block in that ideal world. The International Criminal Court, with the support of 139 signatory countries, came into existence in 2002. Established as an independent judicial body, the court hears cases of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity when national judicial systems cannot or are unwilling to bring alleged offenders to justice. Unlike conventional criminal courts, the ICC has investigative powers. Louise Arbour, former Chief Prosecutor for the Rwandan and Yugoslavian tribunals, described the uniqueness of prosecuting

war crimes. In her 2001 Senator Keith Davey Lecture in Toronto, *War Crimes and the Culture of Peace*, she said the international court must not only deter aggressors from committing the most heinous acts, it must also help to restore peace.

The U.S. was an original signatory to the ICC but George W. Bush backed out. At a subsequent administrative meeting of the court, Ben Ferencz symbolically sat in the empty chair designated for the U.S. representative. He has reason to hope now that the U.S. will come on board. In 2009, President Barack Obama sent an observer to the annual meeting of the ICC.

The second pillar of an effective judicial system is the development of a body of laws. Arbour argues for a new discipline in legal training. Replacing today's military strategists with tomorrow's legal minds trained in the complexity of international criminal law would certainly be a beneficial transition toward a culture of peace. The final step in bringing law to the arena of warfare is Pearson's peacekeepers. The UN has been tepid in responding to crises. Canadians who have served in peacekeeping operations have complained that their mandates were either inadequate or unclear and that their missions have been underfunded and understaffed. In Rwanda, those shortcomings led to genocide. Author Carol Off, in *The Lion, the Fox and the Eagle*, attributes the inaction of the UN to the lack of strategic interest in Rwanda on the part of the permanent members of the Security Council. She notes that the American State Department had struck Rwanda from its list of concerns even after the politicians and bureaucrats knew that massive bloodshed was likely. Perhaps the Americans still believe Lester Pearson was a most dangerous man. In any case, it is clear that a UN peacekeeping force must operate independently of the five permanent members of the Security Council, whose wrangling often leads to inaction. It needs to be a permanent, well-trained and well-equipped force, broadly representative of UN member countries, with its own budget and a clear mandate on its obligations and powers in the

event of a crisis. This is not to say that the force should not be accountable. Like any police force, it would function within the boundaries set by the UN and report to the Peacekeeping directorate. However, it would not have to get approval from the Security Council each time it determined the urgent need for intervention.

As international war crimes jurisprudence evolves, criminal courts may, over time, help to curb the worst excesses of aggressive behaviour and, by fairly meting justice, play a role in restoring peaceful relationships between warring nations or factions. However, too many people in the world still see aggression as a means to achieve their goals and, as long as this culture of conflict exists, wars will continue and civilians will suffer. That was the reasoning behind UNESCO's efforts in the 1990s to develop a programme to build a culture of peace. What made the UNESCO programme outstanding is that its developers took a broad view of peace. Rather than focusing on the political solutions to armed conflict, the plan encompassed the social, economic and environmental prerequisites for an enduring peace. It appealed to the diverse organizations, governmental and non-governmental, to coalesce into "a grand alliance" to achieve respect for human rights, gender equality, sustainable development and tolerance of diversity through education, dialogue and action. The plan was adopted by the UN General Assembly and scheduled to begin in 2001. Derailed by the U.S. response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the idea has persisted.

The UN has succeeded in establishing a number of conventions to ban the use of some of the more insidious weapons such as land mines and cluster bombs. It has also adopted conventions addressing the broader prerequisites outlined by UNESCO. The problem is that, even though these conventions have sufficient support from the world's nations to be adopted, they are often ignored by non-signatories or only partly enforced by others. If UN conventions,

once adopted, were to become binding on all nations, that would form the basis for legal processes beyond crimes against humanity and war crimes. There is a precedent. The rules of the World Trade Organization are enforced through penalties. In fact, it is the only enforceable UN agreement other than the Geneva Conventions.

Much of the infrastructure to resolve disputes before they turn into violent confrontations is already in place. Besides the ICC, there is the International Court of Justice, which helps countries to resolve matters such as border disputes. Outside of the UN, citizens from all locations of the globe have grouped to form arbitration panels to deal with contentious issues such as the shared use of fresh water, mediation services and organizations offering advice on good governance, sustainable agriculture, appropriate engineering solutions and so on. As secretary-general of the UN, Kofi Annan opened the doors to these individuals and non-governmental organizations that constitute civil society. Given the limited resources of the UN – the total annual expenditure by the UN and all its agencies is less than three per cent of the amount spent on militaries – it was a shrewd move. By enabling representatives of organizations to meet directly with UN staff and national delegates, it has become more difficult for national governments to feign ignorance of deplorable situations or evidence that violence is about to erupt or is already in full swing. Human Rights Watch and Silent Witness can provide testimony and visuals from their field staff on abuses and acts of aggression. All those organizations striving to help people build local economies can report from experience the roadblocks to development and the deleterious effects of foreign policies on the efforts of the citizens of less developed regions. They can demonstrate the social and economic costs of conditions imposed by the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund to satisfy the self-interests of the U.S. and European nations that dominate those institutions. By forming coalitions on a common concern,

they can mobilize a significant campaign to press national delegates to act. That was how the ban on land mines came into existence.

As with any significant societal change, the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace would not be smooth or without costs. A world at peace would require smaller Armed Forces. Military bases would probably be reduced in size or closed down. Affected communities would need help in planning for peacetime development. People working in jobs that depend on the war culture would require retraining: scientists, researchers, engineers and factory workers must be equipped to take positions in sectors of society where the peace dividend would be spent. Some might only require help in identifying their transferable skills and finding employment in appropriate businesses or public service. Others may require compensation for early retirement.

Some of the \$3 trillion spent on arms would vanish from economies, mainly those of the developed nations. The defence contractors would not be fatally wounded because most are branches of corporate conglomerates with diversified capabilities. They might, in fact, benefit from the challenges of finding safe ways to dispose of the decommissioned armaments and nuclear waste. The burgeoning mercenary companies would see their businesses dry up.

Some countries have invested heavily in weaponry in recent years because of the perceived or real threat of invasion by the U.S., among them the countries labelled as the “axis of evil” by George W. Bush, those surrounding the current tensions in the Middle East and South Asia and Venezuela. The latter is an interesting study in how national governments can get swept into the war culture. President Hugo Chavez, when he was first elected, poured money into much needed social programs and local industry. After surviving a coup attempt, a referendum on his government and a period of economic destabilization instigated by oil industry managers, he

accused the U.S. of initiating these tactics in order to topple him. The rhetoric on both sides became increasingly vitriolic as time progressed. When the U.S. set up a military base in neighbouring Colombia in 2009, Chavez responded by purchasing fighter jets and destroying the bridges linking the two countries. To paraphrase Eisenhower, every dollar spent on weaponry is theft from a hungry person who needs to be fed. A global commitment to peace would ease tensions and enable countries such as Venezuela to feed their hungry, educate their youth and cure their sick.

The costs and disruption of transitioning to an economy independent of the military-industrial complex are more than offset by savings and, more importantly, the enhancement of human existence. Current expenditures relating to war go far beyond direct military spending. There are the lost opportunities for the dead soldiers and civilians; there are similarly lost opportunities for the physically and mentally wounded in addition to the direct costs of their health care and reintegration into society. There are the displaced civilians who have to be supported in refugee camps and, for the fortunate few, the costs of assisting them to emigrate to a safe place and adjust to a different culture. There is the cost of environmental remediation and the removal of war debris such as land mines and bomb clusters. There is the cost of rebuilding shattered communities. All these costs are borne by taxpayers who contribute to their national government's coffers and, through the government, to the international institutions and agencies. In fact, the only people who profit from war are the private corporations who land the big contracts. Private profit, public cost. The greatest irony is that, in our convoluted world, those costs show up as positive numbers in the calculation of a nation's Gross National Product.

The most significant upheaval will begin to rumble when the UN and its member countries start to address the issues laid out by UNESCO a decade ago. For peace to endure, fundamental

changes in the world order must be planned and implemented. The ever-increasing gap between rich and poor, both between and within countries, is unconscionable. The failure to eradicate poverty is a consequence of a corporate cabal that has stacked the rules for trade to ensure the continued dominance of the already powerful and enforces those rules through institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Charity is not an effective response. In fact, it can exacerbate problems by undermining local producers and service providers. The free market has to give way to a fair market. Restructuring global trade and reintroducing real competition between companies will not sit well with the top one per cent of the world's population but it is necessary to curb their excesses if wealth is to be redistributed more equitably.

Economic restructuring is meaningless if the money-making activities destroy the soil, water and air that sustain life on the planet. Industrial agriculture is one of the worst culprits. Its practice causes dead zones in the oceans, pollutes freshwater rivers, salinates the soil and drains freshwater aquifers. Water, the essence of life, is likely to become the next major source of conflict if we continue to allow sources to be ravaged by industry. Corporations and independent producers alike need to minimize destructive practices and those that pollute or deplete must bear the costs for remediation.

On the social front, the concentration of power in the hands of a miniscule portion of the world's population excludes the vast majority of people from meaningful decision-making. For all the rhetoric about democracy, inclusion has not been a value embraced by the economic and political elites since the mid-1980s. The consequent powerlessness and humiliation breed intolerance, social tensions and political apathy or instability. Meaningful measures to enable people to achieve their life aspirations start with meeting their basic needs of survival and

providing health care, education, public services and opportunities to earn a livelihood and participate in all levels of political decision-making.

There are some positive signs at the international level. The eight most powerful nations, commonly known as the G-8, came to realize in the past decade that the aspirations of emerging economies such as those of China, Brazil and India had to be considered in order to meet the challenges of a changing global economy. Thus emerged an expanded version of the G-8, dubbed the G-20. It is a small step in the right direction. Then again, incremental steps are preferable to revolutions and wars.

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