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978-0-521-51719-5 - The Making of Peace: Rulers, States, and the Aftermath of War
Edited by Williamson Murray and Jim Lacey

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The making of peace

The Making of Peace represents a unique contribution to the study of war: namely, the difficulties that statesmen have confronted in attempting to put back together the pieces after a major conflict. It contains a number of case studies by many leading historians in the United States and the United Kingdom.

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Preface: concluding peace

SIR MICHAEL HOWARD

There are three basic theories of peace. One is that of Thomas Hobbes: Peace is simply the absence of war. The second is that of St. Augustine: Peace is a 'just order', rendered 'just' by divine decree, or, in more modern times, by popular endorsement. In the former case, sin shatters the natural harmony, in the latter, the devices and interests of the ruling classes. The third theory is that of Immanuel Kant: Peace, though desirable, is not a 'natural' condition but has to be 'established': created and maintained by constant human effort.

For Thomas Hobbes, writing as he did during the turmoil of Europe's Thirty Years' War, the natural, or default, condition of man was war, a war of all against all, during which life was 'nastie, poore, solitarie, brutish, and short'. To escape this fate, men had created civil societies to provide protection but were themselves in a state of constant war with each other. Only brief and periodic truces provided peace. Professor Rahe's chapter underlines that this was the view held by the Greek city-states. The signatories of the Peace of Nicias, the first of which we have any enduring record, considered it to be simply 'a long-term truce, and never imagined that it would be a lasting peace'. Nor did they desire it to be so. For them, war was a necessary bonding activity, as important for social cohesion as for group survival. Those who could not prevail in war did not survive either individually or communally, as the unfortunate inhabitants of Melos found to their great cost. The Athenians massacred the male survivors in defeat and sold their women and children into slavery. In such a world, only hegemony could establish 'peace', as it would be by the Romans; a solution requiring not only military supremacy but the will to maintain it over generations, until it becomes internalised by prescription and cultural indoctrination.

The contents of this book then jump two thousand years from the Peace of Nicias in 431 B.C. to that of Westphalia in 1648 A.D.; understandably,

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since their authors deal only with formal agreements between established states and between those dates, ‘states’, as we understand them, did not exist. Rome established its *imperium* in the west over what were basically tribal communities. The Christian Church then underwrote that *imperium* and prolonged it for another millennium, in the shape of the Holy Roman Empire; until, indeed, as Professors Croxton and Parker describe in their chapter, the signatories of the Westphalian settlement ignored papal protests, and international politics became wholly secularised. Until then, wars were legitimised, either to protect Christendom against its heathen adversaries – and even at Westphalia there still lingered the ideal of uniting Christendom against the Turk – or to preserve or restore property rights that were themselves part of a divine hierarchical order constantly broken and having to be forcibly restored; rights that were to outlive their medieval origins and persist, in ‘wars of succession’, for another two centuries after Westphalia.

But, although hereditary claims survived as a convenient criterion of legitimacy, the Westphalian settlement established a new basis for the establishment of peace: the common interest of the states concerned, or *raison d'état*. The principal strategic interest of the victors in the Thirty Years' War, France and her allies, was the destruction of the hegemony that the Habsburg dynasty had threatened to establish over Western Europe. The possibility that an alternative French hegemony might be equally unwelcome does not seem to have occurred to Cardinal Mazarin. But, such interested short-sightedness apart, it was generally agreed that the common interest of the European states lay in the creation and preservation of a ‘balance of power’ to deter and, if necessary, to defeat potential aggressors. This principle was to shape European diplomacy until the First World War.

We have now moved into the age of Kant: At Westphalia, peace was not ‘restored’ but consciously and deliberately ‘established’. Further, peace was no longer simply a Hobbesian truce but rather a condition in itself positively desirable. The domination of Europe by monarchs supported by a feudal aristocracy, who had to be kept out of mischief by fighting, was collapsing in the face of the challenge of a rising class of merchants and businessmen who had to pay for war and drew little profit from it. When peace was established, it was with the intention that it should last, and it was in the interest of all European powers to ensure that it did – hence, the institution of the periodic congresses whose activities this volume describes: congresses attended not only by belligerent but by neutral powers, who underwrote settlements intended to be lasting and in the general interest.

It was in this context that a debate emerged among the victorious powers as to how best to treat their defeated adversaries, a debate that was to surface at the conclusion of every major conflict, not excepting the two world wars of the twentieth century. Should the vanquished foe be ‘debellated’ – that is, so weakened as to be unable to make any more trouble for the foreseeable

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future? Or should he be conciliated by a settlement in whose preservation he would have as much interest as his conqueror? In his account of the Peace of Paris in 1763, which concluded not only the Seven Years' War but almost twenty-five years of continuous conflict between France and Britain, Professor Anderson describes how the Duke of Bedford (a member of the maverick Russell family whose unorthodox views were repeatedly to surface over many generations) warned the British government against 'imposing such terms on France as we are sure she cannot long acquiesce under, and which, when she has taken breath, she will take the first opportunity of breaking'. A British monopoly of naval power, he warned, 'would be at least as dangerous to the liberties of Europe as those of Louis XIV was, who drew almost all Europe on his back'. Lasting peace could best be won, he argued, not by the debellation but by the appeasement of the adversary. As it happened, the settlement was so favourable to France, restoring as it did most of her lucrative West Indian possessions, that it infuriated public opinion in London ('Like the Peace of God,' its critics complained, 'it passeth all understanding'). Yet, even this moderation did not prevent 'almost all Europe' falling on Britain's back when the unforeseen and unforeseeable consequences of the war led to the revolt of the American colonies. 'The very fact of a decisive victory in war', comments Professor Anderson drily, with his eye no doubt on more recent events, 'can foster the illusion that military power is less limited and contingent than in fact it is'.

Although by the end of the eighteenth century the continental powers of Europe had little left to gain from internecine conflict, the colonial powers, primarily Britain, France and Spain, still had a very great deal. Among them, peace, or at least peace overseas, still consisted of Hobbesian truces, until Napoleon's continental campaigns (themselves largely a by-product of his attempt to counter British naval supremacy) exhausted France, antagonised her European allies, and left Britain globally supreme. No longer facing existential threats, the statesmen at Vienna were then able to conclude an eminently rational settlement in which, as Colonel Sinnreich shows, the need to enlist France as a balancing element in the emerging rivalry between her former enemies mitigated the desire to reduce French power, and the other great powers accepted France as an essential partner in the settlement's making and preservation.

But, if France's military power were no longer a matter for immediate concern, she now posed – or was for a time believed to pose – a different and even more lethal kind of threat: one to the legitimacy of the entire states-system. It was not so much the power of French bayonets that her former adversaries feared as the revolutionary ideas of the French. The French Revolution introduced an era in which the Augustinian concept of peace, as a condition established by divine decree and disturbed only by mortal sin, had now revived in secular form through the intellectual efforts of

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his followers. For them also, peace was the natural condition of man, but now only the misgovernment of the ruling classes stood between the people and their enjoyment of it. All that one needed was for the rulers to be overthrown and the peoples of the world to establish free republics for them to live in perpetual amity. France herself might represent an exhausted volcano, but the sparks scattered by Napoleon's armies still smouldered beyond the Rhine and south of the Alps – in the latter case, sedulously fanned by Giuseppe Mazzini and his followers. The statesmen of Vienna were at least as much concerned to extinguish them as to preserve the balance of power. Because no great power had an interest in upsetting that balance, and all proved strong enough to suppress further revolution, the settlement they made endured for nearly half a century.

In fact, the legacy of the Revolution was to be very different from that expected by its instigators. The French had shown that in order to act effectively, 'the people' had to be mobilised as a distinct and self-conscious 'nation'; one distinct, however, not only from their oppressive rulers but from other and alien nations. The French Revolutionary armies may have believed that, by invading their neighbours and overthrowing the *ancien regime* on their borders, they were bringing liberty in their wake and so laying the foundation for a perpetual peace based on the natural unity of all mankind. But those neighbours – Germans, Italians and Spaniards – were less conscious of being released from their fetters than of being occupied by armed foreigners with whom they found they had less in common than they had with their own rulers, who, whatever their faults, were also Germans, Italians or Spaniards. Paradoxically, it was to be the conservative monarchs in Piedmont and Prussia who, by harnessing the new nationalism to their traditional dynastic ambitions, would be the ultimate beneficiaries of the Revolution. Events were to prove that nationalism did not automatically lead to democracy any more than democracy automatically led to peace.

The trouble is that 'the people' are not necessarily peace loving – or, rather, that they may want peace only on terms unacceptable to their neighbours, especially when those neighbours hold beliefs or embody a culture incompatible with their own. When the cultures are so mutually incompatible as to lead to hostilities, any peace treaty is likely, at best, only to represent a truce. That truce may afford sufficient breathing space for mutual understanding to develop, as opposing cultures grow more tolerant or find themselves absorbed in one more powerful. But often the war is simply driven underground, as Professor McPherson shows to have been the case after the American Civil War. Appomattox, he points out, 'did not end the cultural and ideological struggle in which the military conflict was embedded'. The same situation was to recur persistently in the tormented history of Ireland and to appear again in Germany after 1918 – with yet more disastrous consequences for the history of mankind.

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Thus, there developed during the nineteenth century the dogma that any ‘peace’ that did not allow for full ‘national self-determination’ was by definition unjust, and oppressed nationalities had not only the right but the duty to overthrow it. Liberals of the Enlightenment who opposed war in principle joined up enthusiastically in 1914 to fight for the rights of small nations, whether Belgium or Serbia. Unfortunately, after they had won that war, they discovered that the ‘rights’ of nations, whether great or small, were as incompatible with each other as they were with the balance of power. Professor Murray rightly describes the settlement of 1919 as ‘The Peace Without a Chance’. Where the victorious powers enforced national self-determination, as in Eastern Europe, they created a nest of economically unviable, militarily indefensible, and mutually detesting mini-states. Where they abrogated self-determination, as in the case of Germany, they left a major power seething with resentment.

The Treaty of Versailles was indeed the kind of settlement that Bedford had warned against imposing on France in 1763. John Maynard Keynes was not the only prophet who echoed Bedford’s description as one ‘we are sure (Germany) cannot long acquiesce under and will take the first opportunity of breaking’. And, *pace* President Woodrow Wilson, the creation of ‘democracy’ in the defeated powers made little difference. Indeed, the more ‘democratic’ the states concerned, the more they resented the terms imposed on them. Wilson hoped that whatever the imperfections of the actual peace settlement, the creation of the League of Nations would lay the foundation for a just and stable order. But that hope assumed a mutual compatibility of interests that did not exist. As many powers discovered themselves interested in overthrowing the settlement as were interested in maintaining it, and they rapidly developed the capacity to do so.

But, the preservation of peace was no longer simply a question of ‘interest’, *raison d’état*. By the early twentieth century, there was emerging in Europe a philosophy that questioned whether ‘peace’ was desirable at all; whether mankind did not *need* war, in order to avoid racial degeneracy and national humiliation. For some, this represented a simple extension of nationalism: Nations *needed* to fight not only for their existence but for their continuing survival in a Darwinian universe, in which only the fittest survived. For others, it was a rejection of the entire culture of the Enlightenment, with all its consequences in urbanisation, secularism and the creation of a bland, boring, bourgeois world. The guru of the discontented young at the dawn of the twentieth century was no longer Rousseau or Mazzini: It was Friedrich Nietzsche, for whom morality was simply the will of the stronger. Many in Germany had seen the First World War as simply a conflict between *Helden und Handler*, as the economist Werner Sombart put it – heroes against shopkeepers. Supposedly, nations conducted such wars not to redress grievances or to right wrongs: Their object was victory and conquest in

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preparation for yet further wars – the world, in fact, of the ancient Greeks or, more specifically, the Nordic Gods.

It was this element in German thinking that made any peace with her in 1918 highly problematic, and the forcible transition to ‘democracy’ in 1918 did little to weaken German attitudes toward war. With the collapse of ‘bourgeois democracy’ in 1929–1931, there emerged leaders whose ultimate objective was not the assertion of rights or the redress of specific grievances but rather the establishment of a warrior hegemony programmed to fight further wars, and the greater the better. The Second World War was thus a true clash of cultures. No settlement was possible until one or the other had been eradicated. For the Western democracies, it was necessary that their military forces occupy both Germany and Japan, overthrow their bellicose elites, and eradicate their militaristic cultures before the Allies could create a new order that held out any promise of lasting peace.

By the end of the summer of 1945, the victorious powers had eliminated both Germany and Japan as actors on the international scene. In his chapter on the economics of the peace settlement, Jim Lacey underlines how the ‘Bedford debate’ was once more reenacted. This time, the arguments of those who favored the total debellation of the defeated adversary were again defeated: first by the realisation that Germany’s prosperity was inseparable from that of Western Europe as a whole, then by the need to restore her economic and military capability – as it had been necessary to preserve that of France in 1815 – in the interests of the balance of power.

For a new cultural and ideological confrontation had taken the place of the old. Neither the Soviet Union nor the Western Allies were ‘bellicist’, as had been their Fascist adversaries. Neither wanted war. Both aimed at creating an enduring order legitimised by popular consent. But whereas for the West that consent expressed itself through democratic processes, which themselves assumed the existence of market economies, the Soviets believed that mankind could create such an order only after the destruction of ‘war-mongering’ capitalist economies and their replacement by economies based on the ‘peace-loving’ proletariat, under the guidance of a Communist party that retained total control of the economy and political life. Whether that confrontation would have been forcibly resolved had not the development of nuclear weapons established constraints on both antagonists, we shall never know. As it was, both sides tacitly accepted an order comparable to that established in Europe by the Westphalian system, that of *cuius regio, eius religio*: Neither party attempted to interfere with the social system of the other by the overt use of force. A tacit agreement to avoid war preserved the peace, and the balance of terror underwrote the balance of power. No one believed this to be a particularly just order, but it was the best available. Each believed that its own order would ultimately prevail and, eventually, one of them did.

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The settlement of the issues that had led to the Second World War was thus delayed for half a century. But, by then, they had largely settled themselves. A new docile, democratic, and prosperous Germany, happily released from the divisive constraints imposed by the Cold War, had abandoned her strident nationalism and accepted her territorial losses in Central Europe with equanimity. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet Union had restored a Russian state with which the rest of the world could do business and which accepted the loss of her hegemony over Central Europe with relatively good grace.

There was little incentive for the Western Powers to weaken or humiliate their former adversary: The total disintegration of the Soviet Union left little more for them to do and, indeed, they treated the new Russian leaders with commendable civility and restraint. But, in hoping that the new Russia would continue indefinitely to be docile and democratic, they were being overly optimistic. Once they had recovered from the trauma of defeat, the Russians inevitably sought to reassert themselves on the international stage and were as likely to unite behind a national leader who promised to restore their national pride as to turn themselves into a bourgeois democracy happy to do the will of their former adversaries.

That brings us to our current discontents. Professor Kagan has suggested in his chapter that because the leadership of the United States in the 1990s was overwhelmed by the simultaneous settlement of both the Second World War and the Cold War, it missed an opportunity to manage the transition to a new global order – much as had the British after the First World War. But, without considering whether in the 1920s a Britain suffering from imperial overstretch, bankrupted by war debts, at issue with both of its former allies (France and the United States) and riddled with domestic strife was ever in a position to do anything of the sort (or whether the world, including the United States, would have been interested in a new order ‘managed’ by Britain), we may wonder whether seventy years later the United States could really have done any better. Professor Kagan correctly describes her as ‘launched into management of an increasingly chaotic world which [she] had no intellectual basis for comprehending’. But, within a few years, an administration did come to power in Washington that believed itself to have such an intellectual basis for ‘managing’ the world and proceeded to do so.

That basis was the Rousseauite–Wilsonian belief in the natural underlying harmony of democratic societies – societies the United States now possessed the military power to establish, the wisdom to advise on governance, and the economic wealth to sustain. But it bore a close family resemblance to the illusion that had led the French to seek to ‘liberate’ their neighbours two centuries earlier – only to learn in the process, as their own Robespierre, that ferocious revolutionary, put it: ‘No one loves armed missionaries’. What seemed in Washington to be truths self-evident to all humankind

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appeared to many, especially in the Muslim world, more like arguments for the imposition of a culturally alien hegemony, against which they instinctively revolted. It certainly did not appear as forming the foundations for an acceptable international order.

It may be wiser, therefore, to base a search for international order not on any perceived universal yearning for freedom and democracy but rather on a much more basic general desire simply to *avoid war* – linked with a universal aspiration for an improvement in economic conditions, the more likely to come about the longer the peace can last. Such a desire is not confined to democratic states, nor do democratic states necessarily hold it any more strongly than others. Nor are revisionist states with little interest in preserving the international order necessarily ‘evil’. It is certainly not wise to stigmatise them as such because to do so will inevitably make it more difficult to change the context of their attitudes. Moreover, one may need their support next time around.

We may not share the Hobbesian view of war as being the default condition of mankind; but then, neither is harmony, whether decreed by *vox populi* or *vox dei*. We would be wiser to accept the default condition as being *conflict* – perpetual conflicts whose resolution will only precipitate more. But such conflicts need not necessarily be resolved by force, and it is the business of statesmen to ensure that they are not. ‘Peace’ is no more than an order in which war does not settle conflicts. It has to be ‘established’ but, once established, it can become a habit. Its only real enemies are those restless spirits who, for whatever reason, prefer the alternative.