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HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE DISARMED WORLD: A PROBLEM IN THE STUDY OF AN UNPRECEDENTED FUTURE

Many scholars who have thought hard about the problems of peace and war in the thermonuclear age have concluded that mankind is faced with an unprecedented situation. Thus Kenneth Boulding (*Conflict and Defense*, p. 336) has remarked that "Our hope for the future of mankind... lies first in the human imagination, which can create the forms of things unknown and so create the image of possible futures that have not been previously imagined." Thermonuclear war and world disarmament are both thought to be unprecedented possibilities. And from this belief has sprung the notion of many war-peace researchers that study of the past is unlikely to contribute much to understanding of an unprecedented future. Perhaps partly for this reason, few professional historians have become involved in the kind of peace research that has interested many economists, political scientists, and—perhaps preeminently—psychologists.

The study of the past is not limited to professional historians.

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Indeed, it can be argued that all or almost all human learning is based on a more or less self-conscious, more or less self-critical "historianship." Men tend to learn by generalizing from their own previous experience, from their grasp of what has rewarded or punished them in the past. Science is in a sense the restriction of the historian's craft to a small and extremely controllable chunk of the past: an experiment. But large-scale social systems and especially large-scale events like thermonuclear war or disarmament cannot be experimentally replicated. Therefore, the historian's examination of larger, more complex, and less controllable chunks of the past may be more relevant than the experimental scientist's research to problems of future world peace and world war—if indeed any research on the past is relevant. And an examination of the problems the historian faces may cast some light on the problems all men face in thinking about thermonuclear war or world-wide disarmament.

To historians since Herodotus and Thucydides the study of the causes of war has seemed a respectable—indeed, a highly honorable—pursuit. Proposing the study of the causes of "non-wars"—of wars that did not happen—is more likely to draw blank stares from the profession. And yet it would seem to be true that the study of wars that did not happen is necessary both to an understanding of the causes of wars that did and to an understanding of ways in which men might prevent future wars.

The notion of a "non-war" may seem to be peculiarly vague. Let us restrict the term to situations in which intense conflicts are carried on for a relatively long period of time, with considerable expressed hostility but without violence: not situations in which conflicts are relatively quickly and easily resolved through agreement, or disappear because of social change unconnected with the conflict itself. It may at first glance seem arbitrary to restrict the concept in this fashion, but there are several reasons for doing so. For one thing, a "non-war" in the special sense here suggested has a beginning and an end, it has participants and directors; in short, it has more of a focus for research and is in this way more nearly comparable to a war than a long period of relative tranquility would be. For another thing, this kind of "non-war" more nearly represents a sort of matched negative case by which the causes of war

can be examined. Where the intensity of conflict over goals and the intensity of hostility were approximately equal, let us say, why did one conflict eventuate in war and the other in a "non-war"? Finally, the study of this kind of non-war may be more fruitful in understanding our own world, where international conflicts may be more easily expected to remain intense for a long time than to be easily and quickly resolved.

The concept of "non-war" may be classified by citing the period in British-American relations from 1805 to 1812, when such economic weapons as an embargo on trade were used by the United States instead of the weapons of war. This particular non-war is unusual among non-wars in that it happens to have been the subject of a careful historical study—by Bradford Perkins in *Prologue to War.*

Even Perkins, however, did not look at the commercial struggle as a "non-war". That is, he did not examine the reasons the struggle was not a violent one. In order to do so, he might have had to match his "commercial war" with some reasonably similar outright war, in order to discern what had enabled the one conflict to be carried on without and the other with violence. Instead he treated the "commercial war" of 1805-1812 as a unique event, the causes of which could be described from study of that event alone.

This approach is the one usual to historians. Many members of the profession argue that the complexity of historical events is so great that no two particular events can be adequately treated as special cases of a larger category about which generalizations could be made, and that variables are too many and constants too few for adequate comparisons. This argument ignores the amount of generalization and comparison implicit in such words as "war" and "revolution." It also ignores the logical difficulty of proving that any particular factor "caused" an event or was significantly correlated with it unless a paired non-event can be matched with it. Thus if the study of a war suggests that it was caused by the personality structures of the national leaderships, or by clashing imperialist programs of the various national bourgeoisies, or by ideological differences, a similar situation in which the nations did not fight must be examined to see whether these same factors were present. If

they were present, they are clearly not a sufficient cause of war nor even necessarily associated with war in any meaningful way.

It should be noted that this process of comparison could be carried on in either of two ways. Psychologists and other experimental scientists would probably feel more at home if the historian hypothesized some war-causative or war-associated factor (say, intense popular hostility), developed a measure for it (say, angry references to another country in a random sampling of letters to newspaper editors), and then used this measure to compare periods before an outright war, before a propaganda "war," before an economic struggle, before the conclusion of a treaty of commerce and friendship, etc. But historians—precisely because they tend to work "backwards" by starting from an event they wish to study and developing from a study of it some post-hoc generalizations—may well feel better if they have first selected the events they want to compare—such as the Commercial War of 1805 to 1812 with the outright British-American War of 1812-1815—and then extract from the comparison some crucial differences.

Certainly this process has much to recommend it as a way to generate hypotheses, and may even on these grounds appeal to experimental scientists who would doubt its efficacy as a way of verifying hypotheses. Let us then try to take the special kind of "non-war" here described—an intense conflict carried on by non-violent means—and suggest what may be the "causes" that conflict has been carried on this way rather than by means of violence. In order to do this, let us draw on several historical cases of such non-wars—so that we may both show the possibilities of the method, and propose some tentative hypotheses.

In one such case, the means of conducting conflict shifted from violent to non-violent over time. In the first few decades of this century, a frequent way of carrying on racial conflict within the United States was by means of race riots. Thus in the single year 1919, there were seven important race riots, three of them of major proportions. In these three—which occurred in Washington, Chicago, and a rural area of Arkansas—a total of at least 74 persons were killed. A full-length study of these riots suggests that a crucial factor in their initation was unneutral behavior by the police, and a crucial factor in their

being brought to a halt was the arrival of outside police—state militia of the United States Army—who acted more nearly neutral as between whites and Negroes.*

The last major American race riot was in 1943, in Detroit, when 35 persons were killed. Not that from 1943 to 1963—for twenty years—there has been no major race riot in the United States, even though racial conflict has actually become more intense, and the parties in conflict more conscious of the great stakes involved. The summer of 1963 was an example. Racial conflict was at white heat, and yet there was not a single uncontrolled riot of the kind that raged in 1919 in Chicago for a full week, in Washington for four days. In other words, racial conflict in the United States in 1963 was carried on chiefly by means of a "non-war." Why?

Two factors seem to have been important in bringing about the change from war to non-war. First of all, the police—in the broad sense including state troops and the federal Army—were more nearly neutral in 1963 than in 1919, much more ready to intervene in the earliest stages of violence and to prevent either side from using violence (rather than giving one side "permission" to do so and forcing the other to follow suit). It is also important to note that this police force, taken as a whole, is not carrying out the undivided will of government on race relations.

Indeed, on racial questions the various governments of the American system are so divided and disagree so deeply that one might almost say that for racial questions there is no American "government"—that is, no institution capable of focusing and expressing shared values and interests. In other words, on this issue by 1963 there was a fairly neutral police force ready to oppose violence on any hand, but no full-fledged government. Secondly, by 1963 there had been invented a whole arsenal of non-lethal "weapons"—boycott, sit-in, freedom ride, public march, economic reprisals, etc—that have been used by both sides to carry on the "non-war" by non-violent means. At the same time that institutions intended to deter or suppress violence have been strengthened, the parties in conflict have worked out other means

* Arthur I. Waskow, "The 1919 Race Riots: A Study in the Connections Between Conflict and Violence," Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1963.

of advancing the goals which once they could have advanced only by using violence.

Let us look at another case in which "non-var" has succeeded war as a technique: the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1948 to the present. This is too familiar a case to need a long description It is enough to point out that an outside "police" institution—the United Nations, and in effect the combined political weight of the United States and the Soviet Union—forced an end to the war of 1948 and quickly put a stop to the short war of 1956. It is important to note that the outside "police" in this case were reasonably neutral between the parties when it came to political and economic questions, and exerted their force chiefly against the use of ouright violence. Indeed, the outside "police" have permitted the use of boycotts, embargoes, propaganda broadcasts, espionage, economic and technical aid, bribery, and subversion by both sides in the Middle East.

The crucial factors in the continued steering of Arab-Israeli conflict into "non-war" channels seem to have been, first, the existence of developed techniques for pursuing national interest by using political, economic, and psychological weapons; and, second, the existence of an outside force that was capable of punishing either side for the use of violence. It should be specially noted that in the Middle Eastern case (even more clearly than in the case of American racial conflict) the outside institution was not "government", in the sense that it did not focus shared values or interests—except the belief that outright war was too dangerous to permit.

The third case is the one I have already mentioned, the "commercial war" between the United States and Great Britain and the War of 1812. In this instance a "non-war" shifted into outright war, rather than the other way around. In this case, too, there was no outside institution of any sort capable of punishing a resort to war. Although Americans had learned from the pre-Revolutionary period that economic boycotts of British goods were quite effective in exerting the national power without war, and although this "learning" had enabled them to initiate a non-war in 1805, there was no outside compulsion to hold them to non-war in 1812, when the economic weapons seemed to be failing.

Thus one might conclude from an examination of these three cases that both the existence of a well-developed, well-learned arsenal of non-war weapons and the existence of a fairly neutral external policing institution (oriented to the prevention or suppression of violence rather than to the governmental settlement of issues in conflict) are necessary to the fighting of a non-war. This hypothesis would have to be elaborated and tested against other evidence before it could be adopted. But let us accept it provisionally for a moment, and return to the question with which this paper opened: Can this finding out of the past be made relevant to a future disarmed world, or is such a future so radically unprecedented that no history applies?

Certain things can be said about the connection between "non-wars" of the past and a possible disarmed future. First of all, the occurrence of these non-wars indicates that ways do exist for nations and large groups to carry on intense conflict over a long period of time and to "win" or "lose" without resorting to arms. Since continued conflict between nations is assumed in most expectations of a disarmed world, it is important to know that ways have previously been found of carrying on such conflicts without wars. Secondly, it is important to realize that certain kinds of outside policing institutions—not necessarily true governments, but neutral institutions capable of punishing the use of violence—seem to be necessary to the carrying on of a non-war. Third, it is important to know that the deliberate and conscious invention and learning of a whole repertoire of non-war weapons seems to be essential to the successful pursuit of a non-war. And finally, knowing that a neutral police and a non-war arsenal are important suggests that we need to know under what social conditions each of these is most easily arrived at. Is fear of widespread death and destruction enough to bring either of them? Or are other factors involved?

This last point is important because research on it may suggest whether it is possible to work on a neutral police and a non-violent arsenal before the world disarms, and if so, how. In other words, it might be possible to deliberately create precedents in the present, armed world for some of the factors that seem to be essential in carrying on a non-war. It might be possible to invent and use non-violent weapons (economic, political, psycho-

logical) and to invent and use an international, extranational, or supranational police force. And most important, it might be possible to "practice" with these institutions and techniques, to predict how they should work and then test them out on a small scale to see—a kind of action research that is impossible to do with thermonuclear warfare.

This examination of the problems of studying causality in such a difficult area as the future therefore leads to these conclusions: that for at least one possible component of a possible future, the pursuit of intense conflict without resort to war, it is possible to undertake research and action that would inform each other: research that would indicate what next steps might be taken by the governments, and action that would confirm or disprove research hypotheses.