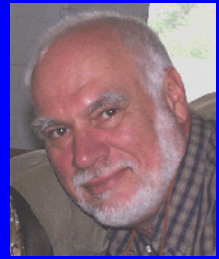


Bellicose Veins—the roots of violence in US culture

**“WAR FOR PEACE”
& THE NEED TO SWIM UPSTREAM**

August 2003



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Resisters to the war in Vietnam touted the slogan, “Make love, not war,” as a protest to the prevailing US action in Vietnam. At first hearing the phrase seems to suggest that dropping out for sex, drugs, and rock and roll are a replacement for bellicose activities. But, the cleverness of this slogan lay not in its sign-of-the-times relevance to the hippy generation and the “Summer of Love.” The war and the draft were certainly serious threats to the “Me Generation,” who had known few threats to their well being in growing up. What they identified as the “military-industrial complex” was about their future, and they didn’t learn to like it until they became part of it.

However, buried in the slogan was the important truth that one cannot not fight violence with violence without being caught up a cycle that repeats itself with karmic intensity. While the slogan and much else turned the tide of much popular opinion against the war in Vietnam, it became clear that the war could not go on because it simply cost too much and could not be won, not because of a failure of the cultural value of “war for peace.” In fact, many critics continue to speak of the failure in Vietnam as due to a lack of political will that restraints placed on the military’s use of more aggressive strategies.

The expression, “War for peace” owes its US popularity largely to Theodore Roosevelt, gentleman cowboy turned president (served 1901-1909), whose motto was “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” Roosevelt was himself a famous war hero for leading the charge of his Rough Riders up San Jan hill in Cuba. As a result of the Spanish-American War which he championed, the US became an imperial power with territorial possessions around the world. “All the great masterful races have been fighting races,” boasted Roosevelt, “And no triumph of peace is quite so great as the triumphs of war.” Paradoxically, Roosevelt achieved most of his goals with both bellicose and diplomatic rhetoric and strongly supported international arbitration. The Teddy Bear is named after him.

Nonetheless, the concept of “war for peace” seems to be the US reason, or perhaps rationalization for most of its bellicose activity in the last 100-plus years. USians have essentially prided themselves on being a peaceful people who only went to war for the sake of peace. It is what we would like to believe about ourselves. War for peace is not about self-defense. It is about undertaking military initiatives where one perceives threat (or perhaps more often than we would like to believe, political or economic advantage spiced with threat). Yes, there is generally a pretext, an offence committed or purportedly committed by a foreign power that tips us over the brink into war, a necessary justification. But, more and more deterrence through first-strike policies is being promoted.

Is “war for Peace” actually a US value? Is the desire for peace is so strong that one paradoxically accepts its opposite to have it, despite lessons that tell clearly that wars “to end

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all wars" are the chief generators of future wars? Or, is it indeed one of those mixed slogans that politicians can sell so easily because it justifies latent violence with the highest of motives. Political rhetoric from Roosevelt through Bush would lead one to believe the latter is the case. Today we can listen to the speeches of these men on the Internet and catch the flavor of the rhetoric, not only the words.

The vision of a peaceful empire is a strong motivator for many people, and indeed currently an explicit part of the neoconservative agenda. The instrument for this is "war for peace" when and where it seems doable. Doable today seems to mean where we can do it with few casualties and quickly and come off looking invincible. Strangely coincident with the Iraq War was the intensification of spam to the point that anyone with an email account is liable to get 15 to 50 ads daily for aids to "get it up" and "make it bigger, longer and stronger" (whether the email recipient has one or not?!)

This explains the choice made in the case of Afghanistan and twice in Iraq as well as the reluctance to engage North Korea where we once experienced over 50,000 casualties and still have about 9,000 individuals unaccounted for.

Is there an alternative to "war for peace?" Certainly there have been and could be many imaginative ways to address conflict. In the Vietnam years, one heard the line, "What if they gave a war and nobody came." The pacifism of Gandhi is one of the few that has been tried and found successful. In order to approach conflict differently, we don't need solutions as much as the ability to deal with our own impatience for action and our own anger and outrage at the other. It is hard to address and alter a cultural paradigm with the currency of "war for peace" because "just" impatience and anger are daily reinforced both in real world reportage and in fiction. With a new attitude come new solutions. Swimming upstream in ones own culture takes much effort.