

1914-2014: One Hundred Years of Conflict, An Age of Endless Wars

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Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The “great powers” are marking the centenary of World War One. Ironically the world is still at war. There are global and regional conflicts in progress. Rising tensions between India and Pakistan (two nuclear powers), US-NATO led “civil wars” in Iraq and Syria, as well as the on-going Palestinian Israeli “armed conflict” which continuous without an end in sight. Europe has not been spared the horrors of conflict in 2014 either. Ukraine has descended into a mutually agreed upon slaughter fest. Call it a proxy war if you like. That is, this eastern European former Soviet republic is now the scene of a re-newed and revived cold war gone hot. One more militariseddispute, in which a former superpower and another in rapid decline go head to head against each other all over again. It is all a bit like Muhammad Ali -Joe Foreman (“The Rumble in the Jungle”) rematch many years later on. Who will win this new match or protracted conflict this time? Place your bets, ladies and gentleman! Strictly on the basis of hardnosed, geo-political considerations, I will put my money on Moscow . It is simply a question of geography. The Ukraine- Russia border is to the Kremlin, what the US-Mexico border is to the White House. In other words, both these highly sensitive areas belong to what should be uncontested spheres of influence.

During the cold war the superpowers respected this reality. Today this is no longer evidently the case. Everything is up for grabs it seems. All the armed animosity of course leads indubitably and tragically to rising militarism and jingoism in today’s world. Places like Ukraine , Turkey or North Korea , where conflict has become almost indigenous to the nation’s history and collective memory come to mind. One hundred year after the 1914-18 conflagrations, we are also seeing such disturbing trends in certain “western democracies” as well. This is evident in the case of Canada , in the wake of the so called “terror attack” on the country’s legislature or House of Parliament last month. Observe the almost bombastic glorification of the military in the realm of civilian life. Government sponsored campaigns aimed at reviving patriotic fervour among the populace has become a feature of everyday life. Thus preparing or “massaging” with the help of the media, the domestic population for long term overseas war or perhaps another quagmire like conflict such as Iraq or Afghanistan . Concomitantly there’s an increase in the surveillance and the security apparatus of the state; as if to deal with any potential “home grown” potential threats which may arise. Hence, repressive measures are taken under the guise of “national security” imperatives.

Europe in 2014: War and peace in the age of austerity

Of course if you’re in the arms industry these are good times indeed. Those Tomahawk missiles are in action again, thanks to the rag tag Islamists (or possibly CIA armed, trained and financed insurgents) known as “ ISIS ”. Nevertheless, somewhat ironically despite more

armed conflicts world wide, defence budgets are stagnating. This seems to be the case in Europe , the theatre of the last two world wars or mass slaughters of the 20th century. The “old continent” overall, is reluctant to increase military spending. Yet despite the economic hardships of austerity, the victors of WWI (UK , France) are purchasing more weaponry. The allies’ former foes (Austria and especially Germany) are for obvious historical considerations, loath to boost outlays for the military establishment. Berlin and Vienna seek to use the powers of diplomacy and economic might to maximise their clout in the world. Guns and armed men seem to be a thing of the past as far as they are concerned. Both EU member states, have taken a more conciliatory and less confrontational tack with respect to the perceived foreign “incursions” and “meddling” next door in Eastern Ukraine .

1914: Satirising the “great war” on stage

Finally two great journalists and satirists of their time may be recalled in these days of remembrance. The Austrian, Karl Kraus the author of the magnum opus “The Last Days of Mankind” and his Czech contemporary Jaroslav Hasek who penned the classic “ The Good Soldier Svejk” . These works have inspired a wonderful stage version of these two works (1) currently being performed in Prague . Both Kraus and Hasek denounced the militarisation of domestic life. They exposed the manipulative role of press, the propagandists in aiding and abetting the war. Their writings revealed the devastating impact of the war’s aftermath on the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These literary social commentators used the powerful tools of mockery combined with truculent language, to expose the establishment’s complicity in inciting the conflict. They were prescient and envisioned in their works, a state of affairs which very much reflects the world we live in one hundred years later on.

Notes

(1) Le carnaval tragique, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2014>

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