

“Conflict Is Required” – Exposing America’s Warfare State

Description

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“Dulce et Decorum est” is a poem written by Wilfred Owen during World War I, and published posthumously in 1920. The Latin title is taken from Ode 3.2 of the Roman poet Horace and **means “it is sweet and fitting ...”**. It is followed there by “pro patria mori”, which means “to die for one’s country”.

The United States is a warfare economy, its primary export is violence and it is through violence that it creates the demand for its products. The markets of the Empire are the failed states, grinding civil conflicts, escalating regional tensions and human immiseration created by gun-boat diplomacy. In true entrepreneurial spirit, the United States has repeatedly overestimated its abilities to control the course of events and underestimated the complexities of a market predicated on violence. However, since the beginning of the twenty-first century the American Imperium has proven itself as incompetent as it is vicious. After nearly two decades of intensifying conflicts, a fundamentally broken global economy and a dysfunctional political system, Washington has turned feral, lashing out against decline.

The points of instability in the global system are various and growing, and the only geo-political logics that the Imperium appears to be operating under are threats, coercion, and violence. It is at this moment, with the most erratic president in the country’s history, surrounded by some of the most extreme neo-conservative voices, that the United States has been belligerently stumbling across the globe. In the past few months we have witnessed a surrealistic reimagining of the Latin American coup, the medieval melodrama of Canadian vassals taking a royal hostage from the Middle Kingdom and British buccaneers’ privateering off the coast of Gibraltar. The Imperial system is in a paroxysm of incoherent but sustained aggression.

It has long been clear that if another Great War were to emerge, it would likely begin in the Middle East. Just over a century later, we have found ourselves amidst another July crisis of escalating military and diplomatic confrontations. European modernity immolated itself in the Balkans through miscalculation, overconfidence and the prisoners dilemma of national prestige. The conditions of the contemporary Middle East are no less volatile than those of Europe when the Austro-Hungarian Empire decided to attack Serbia. If anything, conditions are far more complex in a region entangled with allegiances and enmities that transgress and supersede the national borders imposed in the wake of the first world war.

The United States’ withdrawal from the JCPOA and the stated aim of reducing Iranian oil exports to zero has enforced a zero-sum logic between the American Imperium and Persia. With each move and counter move the two countries are further entangled into the dynamics of a conflict. Much like the run up to July 28th 1914, tanker seizures, drone shoot downs, sanctions, military deployments and general bellicosity reinforce the rational of the opposing sides and make it harder to back down without losing face and appearing weak.

Due to the asymmetry of the two powers the Iranians have the fewest options for de-escalation while the American establishment perceives the least incentive. This dynamic is further exacerbated by major regional powers agitating for a conflict they believe they will benefit from. Indeed, the slide to war might be inexorable at this point, the momentum of historical causality may have already exceeded the abilities of those in power to control. Czar Nicholas and Kaiser Wilhelm were cousins that desperately wanted to avoid war and were nonetheless impotent to avert disaster. There is nowhere near such intimacy, communication and motivation in our current context.

If war with Iran erupts, the Pax Americana will come to an end and humanity will fully enter a new historical epoch. The most unlikely scenario is an easy victory for the United States, yet even this outcome will only exacerbate the decline of the Empire. The other great powers would expedite their exit from the dollar system and drastically increase investment into the means to counter American hegemony. Likewise, victory would further reinforce Washington's hubris, generating more serious challenges to the Imperial order and making the US prone to take on even bigger fights. Ironically, easy military success would almost assure the outbreak of a third world war in the long-term.

War with Iran would likely ignite violence in Israel-Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq, re-energise and expand the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen as well as generate sectarian violence and domestic insurgencies across the Middle East. Under such conditions regional actors would likely utilise a dramatically intensifying conflict as cover for their own agendas, for example with a renewed Turkish assault on the Syrian Kurds. The conditions for rapid escalation are extremely high in which non-linear dynamics could easily take hold and quickly outstrip any attempts to maintain control of the situation.

Pyrrhic victory for either side is the most likely outcome, making the parallels to the Great War all the more salient. Global conflagration is a possibility, but with "luck" the fighting could be contained to the region. Nonetheless, amplified refugee crises, supply chain disruptions and immense geopolitical realignments will cascade out of such an event. Undoubtedly, there would be concerted efforts to abandon the dollar system as quickly as possible. Furthermore, rapid increases in the price of oil would all but grind the global economy to a halt within a matter of months, tipping citizenries already saturated with private debt into financial crises.

Furthermore, the entanglement of the military-industrial complex, the petrodollar reserve currency system and the omni-bubble generated by quantitative easing has left the Empire systemically fragile. Particularly, the bubble in non-conventional fuels precipitated by QE, depressed oil prices with scaled down exploration, R&D and maintenance makes the possibility of a self-reinforcing collapse in the American energy and financial systems extremely plausible. It is a Gordian knot which war with Persia would leave in fetters.

The most likely long-term outcome of a war with Iran would be the economic isolation and political fragmentation of the United States. What is assured is that whatever world results it will not look anything like the world since 1945. The first world war collapsed the European world system, dynasties that had persisted for centuries were left in ruins and the surviving great powers crippled by the overwhelming expenditures of blood and treasure. We are on the precipice of another such moment. The American world system is fundamentally dependent upon the relationship between warfare, energy dominance and debt.

Conflict is required to maintain control of the energy markets which prop up a financialised economy. A dynamic that puts the nation deeper in hock while amplifying resistance to

financial vassalage. Losing energy dominance undermines the country's reserve currency status and weakens the Empire's ability to generate the debt necessary to sustain the warfare economy. Likewise, the system of national and international debt peonage parasitizes global populations to work against their own best interests. This fuels resentment and resistance which further drives the warfare economy. It is, in the inimitably American expression, a "self-licking ice cream cone."

On August 3rd 1914, one week into the war, the British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey famously remarked that "the lamps are going out across Europe and we shall not see them relit in our lifetime." At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we face similar, terrifying prospects. Indeed, we could witness the collapse of democratic societies for a very long time to come. **If we have any hope of averting calamity we need to generate loud opposition to imperialist warfare.**

This does not mean some hackneyed anti-war movement based on past glories and the parochialism of domestic politics, but earnest effort to find common cause in resisting the insanity of those that seek profit in our collective suffering. **This means working with people that we have very deep disagreements with by respecting our mutual opposition to the masters of war.** It also means serious commitment to strategies such as tax and debt strikes as expressions of non-consent as well as other peaceful means of direct action. Indeed, it is from a place of agreement that we can potentially rebuild civil discourse and renew our trust in the ability of democratic institutions to mediate our quarrels. Perhaps it is too late to change course, but how sweet and fitting it is to face madness with dignity.

"What is the cause of historical events? Power. What is power? ...power is a word the meaning of which we do not understand. "

"Kings are the slaves of history."

– Tolstoy, War and Peace