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www.afgazad.com

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If Europe is 'a culture of peace', why NATO?

If Europe is genuinely a culture of peace, it needs to reconsider its security policies that arose during the Cold War.

Richard Falk

6/11/2012

It is undoubtedly true that the greatest unacknowledged achievement of the European Union is to establish "a culture of peace" within its regional enclosure for the 68 years since 1944. This has meant not only the absence of war in Europe, but also the absence of "war talk", threats, crises, and sanctions - with the single important exception of the NATO Kosovo War of 1999 that was part of the fallout from the breakup of former Yugoslavia. This legally controversial intervention was undertaken by the US-led alliance to achieve several goals: to rescue Albanian Kosovars from a feared imminent humanitarian catastrophe at the hands of their oppressive Serb occupiers; to facilitate the *de facto* independence of Kosovo from Serbian rule; to demonstrate the post-Cold War viability of NATO; and to reinforce the victory claims of the 1991 Gulf War, thereby showing that the West could win wars with minimal casualties on its side due to a recently acquired technological ability to shift the human burdens of war almost entirely to the adversary.

The contrast with the first half of the 20th century is stark when Europe seemed definitely the global cockpit of the war system in the East-West struggle for global supremacy. Tens of millions of Western soldiers and civilians died in response to the two German attempts by force of arms to gain a bigger role within this European nexus of geopolitics, as organised in the West. Germany challenged the established order, not only by recourse to massive aggressive wars in the form of World Wars I and II, but also by establishing a political infrastructure that gave rise

in the 1930s to the violently genocidal ideology of Nazism, the most diabolical rendering of fascism.

'Culture of peace'

Even during the Cold War decades, Europe was not really at peace, but always at the brink of an unimaginably devastating third world war.

Also, to some extent the Soviet Union, with its totalitarian variant of state socialism, was as much European as it was Asian, and thus to a degree the Cold War was being fought within Europe, although its violent dimensions were prudently "outsourced" to the global periphery.

Despite the current plans to surround Russia with "defensive" missile systems, purportedly to construct a shield to stop Iranian missiles, there seems little threat of any war being fought within European space, and even a war-threatening diplomatic confrontation seems improbable at this point.

In many respects, the EU has incubated a culture of peace in its homeland, which although partial and precarious, has been transformative for Europeans - even if this most daring post-Westphalia experiment in regional integration and sovereignty has been wrongly assessed. It is almost always evaluated from an economic perspective best appreciated by examining trade and investment statistics, monetary union, and regional economic management.

The deep financial crises now afflicting the Mediterranean members of the EU dominates the public imagination as to the nature of the EU. What is absent from this image of the EU is a realisation that regional peace is likely to be remembered as the most notable and durable achievement of the organisation.

To be sure, many foreign policy experts tend to interpret claims about an internally peaceful Europe in a far more guarded fashion. First because Europe has for decades had the unifying benefit of an external Soviet adversary that exerted great pressure on the governments to reach a political consensus on security. Secondly, Europe was able to count on a continuing and reliable US nuclear umbrella that deterred Soviet provocations. This idea of common security in Europe was hegemonically instrumentalised via NATO, which not only protected Europe but also dulled the sharp edges of intra-European disagreements.

This latter role helps us understand the deployment in Europe of US forces so long after the fighting stopped in 1944, even if gradually troop levels were reduced from over 300,000 to the present 50,000. Even this smaller military presence is maintained at a high cost to the United States, but it is widely seen in Washington as both a guarantor of peace in Europe and as an expression of US global engagement and permanent abandonment of its earlier geopolitical stance toward Europe that was one of non-involvement, often called "isolationism".

Such a stance was never truly descriptive of US foreign policy, which was almost from the time of its independence from Britain was expansionist and disposed toward intervention in

hemispheric affairs, although it did prudently refrain from taking sides in struggles among European states.

The dark side

While I would, with some qualifications, affirm the European experience with regionalism as a potential step forward from the perspective of global governance, there are some darker features of European behaviour that need to be taken into account. The colonial powers did not give up their empires without a fight.

While the EU was emerging from the wreckage of World War II, European powers fought some dirty wars in futile efforts to hold onto their overseas empires in such places as Malaysia, Indonesia, Indochina and Algeria. In a sense, the European culture of violence toward non-Europeans was taken over by the United States in its almost continuous engagement in counterinsurgency warfare against the peoples and nations of the global south, a mode of one-sided warfare that reached its climax during the Cold War in Vietnam and has risen to alarming levels of destructiveness in Afghanistan and Iraq.

There are also some broader matters of global policy involved. After the end of the Cold War, the Western security priorities shifted from the defence of Europe against a Soviet threat to an ongoing campaign led by the United States to control the geopolitics of energy and to counter the growing Asian influence of China.

This refocusing shifted the fulcrum of world conflict from Europe to the Middle East and the Pacific, a process strongly reinforced by Washington's willingness to follow Israel's lead on most matters of regional security in the Arab world. In such settings external to the territorial domain of the EU, the approach adopted under US leadership has been premised on discretionary recourse to violence under NATO banners, as in Afghanistan and Libya, especially following the US resecuritisation of world politics along liberal internationalist lines since the NATO War in Kosovo, and even more so after the 9/11 attacks.

The recent intimations of a coming war against Iran, allegedly because it is on the verge of a capability to acquire nuclear weapons, is a further demonstration of the contrast between the EU as a European regional arrangement based on the seeming rejection of war as a foreign policy option and NATO as a Western hierarchal alliance that performs as a discretionary mechanism of military intervention in the non-Western world, especially in the energy-rich countries of the Muslim Middle East.

Target: Iran

Iran is the poster child of such separation of Europe as a zone of peace from the Islamic world as a zone of war. It is notable that the threats to attack Iran in the coming months, as well as the imposition of four stages of crippling sanctions are justified by reference to the security threats posed by Iran's nuclear programme, which is allegedly moving close to the threshold of nuclear weaponry.

It could certainly be questioned as to whether in the event that Iran was intent on acquiring nuclear weapons, and thereby violating its pledge under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, there would even then exist adequate legal, moral, and political grounds for recourse to a disabling NATO military attack.

If the encounter with Iran were to be more reasonably contextualised it would make us aware of the relevance of Israel's stealth acquisition and development of nuclear weapons, accumulating an arsenal estimated to exceed 300 warheads at this time. The exclusions of geopolitical discourse, facilitated by a compliant media, allows Israel to lead the charge against Iran's supposed quest for nuclear weapons without even being compelled to acknowledge their own stockpile of nuclear weapons. With greater detachment it seems obvious that the most prudent and equitable approach to a concern about nuclear weapons would be for all states in the region to renounce unconditionally their intention either to develop or possess this infernal weaponry of mass destruction, and that would have to include Israel.

But the situation is even more distressing than such a provocative embrace of double standards. The available evidence makes it doubtful that Iran is even trying to become a nuclear weapons state. This conclusion is supported by an apparent agreement of all 16 US intelligence agencies - that share the view that a high probability exists that Iran abandoned its nuclear weapons programme in 2003, and has not since resumed it. This intelligence consensus corresponds with the Iranian insistence that it is not seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

The moves toward war against Iran have been amplified by repeated threats of attack in violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, as well as by deliberately imposing punitive sanctions of intensifying severity and by engaging in unlawful destabilising intrusions on Iranian sovereignty taking the form of targeted killings of several nuclear scientists, the encouragement of anti-regime violence, and the highly provocative engagement in cyber warfare by way of disabling the Iran nuclear programme of uranium enrichment through a computer worm reportedly jointly developed with Israel, named Stuxnet.

Europe is apparently a willing and complicit junior partner of the United States in this post-colonial reassertion of Western interests in the oil-rich Middle East, and thus complements its imperfect regional culture of peace with a renewed dangerous commitment to a global culture of war and hegemony.

R2P who?

As might be expected, this kind of European role external to Europe has sparked a variety of anti-European acts of violent opposition, most dramatically the Madrid bombing of 2005 and the London Underground bombings of 2007. In reaction, much of Europe has moved in an ugly Islamophobic direction, giving rise to anti-immigrant reactionary politics that are mainly directed against Islamic minorities living within its midst, to a reluctance to move down the negotiating road leading to Turkish accession to EU membership, and to various restrictions of religious freedom associated with the practice of devout Islamic women who wear a headscarf or burqa.

What is striking here are the various efforts by the US-led West to sustain its privileged world position by relying on its military superiority. In effect, this represents an attempt to renew the colonial hierarchy of North/South relations in the post-colonial world order.

The state system has been universalised since 1945, but the countries of the global north, under US leadership, have continuously intervened in the south to promote Western interests at the cost of millions of lives. This pattern was earlier put forward as integral dimension of worldwide anti-Soviet and anti-Chinese geopolitics, and more recently, so as to secure oil reserves and to counter Islamic political moves to control national governance structures, as in Afghanistan. The West no longer seeks to fly its flag over the governmental buildings of non-Western countries, but it as hungry as ever for their resources, as well as to encourage receptivity to foreign investment and trade interests by maintaining numerous costly military bases.

Whether to slay the dragons of Communism or Islam, or to satisfy the bloodthirsty appetites of liberal internationalists that champion "humanitarian interventions", the dogs of war are still howling in the West. The doctrinal masks of law and a UN mandate obscure the realities of aggressive war making, but should not be allowed to deceive those genuinely dedicated to a peaceful and just world. For one thing, we should not be fooled by belligerent governments relying on the supposedly legitimising *imprimatur* of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm, as in Libya or Syria, to mount their military operations, while simultaneously adhering to a non-interventionary ethos when it comes to Gaza, Kashmir, Chechnya, Kurdistan, Tibet.

Of course, consistency is not the whole story, but it does penetrate the thick haze of geopolitical hypocrisy. A more basic indictment is the failure by the EU to renounce violent geopolitics and its related refusal to defer to the dynamics of self-determination when it comes to the resolution of internal struggles for control of the state.

Let us reflect upon the fact that the biggest successes so far in the Arab Spring took place where the uprisings were essentially non-violent and there was minimal external interference, and in contrast, the most dubious outcomes have occurred whenever the struggle for change turned violent, and the opposition sought and received decisive military assistance from external sources.

Reconsidering policy

Unfortunately, despite the complexities involved we cannot count on the United Nations - partly because the veto always creates the possibility to preclude appropriate responses (as in relation to Israeli abuses of Palestinians) - or its failure to be used, due to geopolitical pressures which authorise essentially unlawful warfare (as in relation to the Libyan intervention where opponents abstained rather than blocked military action). True, the UN can sometimes withhold its certification for aggression, as it did in 2003 when the Security Council rejected the US appeal for a mandate to invade and occupy Iraq, but even then the UN stood mutely to one side once the aggression took place, and even entered Iraq to play its part in consolidating the occupation of the country that followed upon the unlawful attacks

It is not surprising that UN headquarters in Baghdad was lethally targeted by anti-occupation Iraqi forces. The UN is certainly useful in certain peacemaking and peacekeeping settings, but when it comes to war prevention it has lost credibility because its actions and inactions are tied too closely to the lingering dominance and priorities of Western geopolitics.

These critical assessments highlight the need of persons seeking peace and justice to work within and beyond the established channels of institutional governance. And more specifically, to take note of what Europe has achieved, and might yet achieve, without overlooking past and present colonial and colonialist wrongdoing. In this respect, we need both a UN that becomes as detached as possible from its geopolitical minders and a robust global Occupy Movement that works to provide the peoples of the world with a democratic public order that protects our lives and is respectful of nature's limits.

Steps in this direction would involve giving the UN a measure of financial independence by imposing some sort of transaction tax (or "Tobin tax"), establishing a volunteer UN Emergency Force to address humanitarian crises and natural disasters, and providing the world's public with a relevant venue by establishing a global people's assembly that would not be selected by, nor accountable to, governments. Such practical reforms seem unlikely at present, but so did the International Criminal Court - until a coalition between supportive governments and a network of NGOs defied the odds, and accomplished the impossible in 2002.

If Europe is genuinely a culture of peace it needs to reconsider its security policies that arose during the Cold War. Was not NATO formed as an instrument of collective self-defence in territorial Europe? If this is so, why was NATO not dissolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Was it beneficial for Europe to deterritorialise NATO, redefine the NATO mission as primarily one of geopolitical peacekeeping, and keep the alliance going as part of the US effort to dominate global security? Is NATO still worth the cost? Would not Europe and world be better off if the EU projected outward its culture of peace and became more independent of the United States in the security domain? Why not acknowledge the moral and political failure of these out-of-area NATO interventions? Why does the EU instead not take the lead in advocating moves towards negotiated and phased nuclear disarmament? And why not rely on soft power diplomacy and UN initiatives to pursue European interests outside of Europe? It will not be easy to swim against the still prevailing realist tide in matters of global security.

The *Financial Times*, in its lead editorial of May 21, curtly informed European governments that they were losing influence in the world by not investing sufficiently in expensive new weapons systems. In effect, Europe should stop being a security free loader and begin pulling its global weight, according to the logic of hard power diplomacy. Only then could it hope to be taken seriously in world affairs. In the words of the editorial writer, "the US and Europe are taking increasingly divergent paths as military actors. The US is styling itself as a Pacific rather than a European power, one focused on the challenge from China. Meanwhile, European governments are slashing defence budgets to cope with the economic maelstrom".

If Europe does not reverse course, it "risks military impotence and irrelevance in the long run". Such a recipe for geopolitical leverage seems stuck in the policy templates of the prior century.

The *Financial Times*, as an influential dispenser of high minded counsel, seems intent on delivering a message to European governments and publics worthy of the doomed Dodo.