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The Madness of Endless War *Killing for Peace*

by WINSLOW MYERS

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Since 9-11-01, the United States, by any objective assessment a globe-girdling military empire, has been sucked into an ongoing global civil war between brutal extremists (often fighting among themselves) and those, including us, they perceive as their mortal enemies. We are rightfully outraged by cruel beheadings videotaped for Internet distribution. The beheaders and suicide bombers are equally outraged by our extensive military presence in their ancestral homelands and drone attacks upon weddings.

Meanwhile, though the government of our mighty empire can read our emails and tap our telephones, the worldwide nonviolent movement to bring about positive change somehow flies completely under its supposedly all-seeing radar screens. The peoples of the earth are overwhelmingly against war, and they want their fair share of the earth's resources and the possibilities of democratic governance. Academic studies (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why*

Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict) have proven that, overall, nonviolent movements are more effective for reaching such goals than violent military ones.

Our media narrows discourse and fans the flames by only allowing U.S. citizens to see through the narrow lens of exceptionalism, polarization and violence. Fear mongers, legion in our culture, insist that adherents of ISIS are hardly human. But we should keep their humanity in our hearts even as we abhor their acts, just as we ought to abhor our own descent into torture and extra-judicial killings. People do not do what those ISIS fighters do without having been rendered desperate and callous by some painful sense of injustice. As Auden wrote, “Those to whom evil is done/do evil in return.” The question for us is how we can best respond to evil without rationalizing our own evil behavior.

Setting aside the blurry distinction between the sadism of beheadings and the supposed good intentions of those who control the drones, our side and theirs share the conviction that the only solution to this great conflict is killing. If ISIS can kill enough of its enemies, a Caliphate can be established from Lebanon across to Afghanistan, obliterating the despised arbitrary borders created by the colonial powers after World War I. Conversely, if the West can only assassinate enough terrorist leaders in Afghanistan and Yemen and Syria, moderate elements will emerge from the slaughter to renounce the vain and presumptuous notion that Islam is destined to conquer a pluralistic world.

But the presumptions of both present American empire and possible Muslim empire are equally vain and closed-minded in their separate ways. Continued mass killing by either side will never resolve the underlying cultural disparities, and so unless we think in new ways, this planetary civil war will continue, multiplying recruits to terror faster than they can be exterminated—a perpetual motion meat-grinder of violence.

We can’t just leave the various extremist groups to fight it out among themselves. We have to lead, but why not lead in a new direction? Amid all the hand wringing about least bad options, there is a good option: change the game. Admit that the U.S. occupation of Iraq led to some unforeseen outcomes. Call an international conference that includes representatives from as many parties that are willing to consider how to contain and end the violence. Agree to embargo the arms pouring into the region.

The possibility that we are already fighting a third world war, having forgotten the lesson of how little anybody wanted or expected to get into the first one, suggests the need to call upon the spirit of figures like King and Dag Hammarskjöld, that world ambassador for peace. As we look

down the time stream, it becomes harder and harder to guarantee who will and who will not be able to possess nuclear weapons. Even now some disaffected Pakistani general might be transferring a warhead to some non-state actor with malign intentions. It is equally possible that someone in the U.S. military could go rogue with a nuke, initiating catastrophe.

Is a third world war leading to total destruction the intention of either the Christian God or the Muslim Allah? The opportunity is for all parties to accept this possibility and build agreements based in a common desire for human survival—listening at last to the pleas of millions around this small planet who desperately want the madness of endless war to cease.