

Gwynne Dyer, "The End of History? The End of War?"

At the start of this century, while Canadian soldiers marched against the Boer in South Africa, it already seemed that such conflicts were becoming an anachronism. Many imperial subjects vigorously opposed the war, and argued that there was nothing treasonous about taking

no signs of reluctance. In the end, about 10 per cent of the NATO bombs dropped on Yugoslavia were Canadian.

We seem to have come to the conclusion that the UN is no longer the only international body with authority, that sometimes we should circumvent this organization in which Canadians have invested so much. On the other hand, consider why we have come to this conclusion, and why we have taken such aggressive action: we have done this primarily to keep people from being murdered or driven from their homes by forces that were almost entirely malevolent, and

Crossroads at Kosovo

But things have a way of turning around, and most of the leaders and senior officials who ducked their humanitarian responsibilities in Rwanda and Bosnia are still in power. And I think that in the later years of this decade they have been feeling pretty guilty. I think that guilt was a powerful force in their decision to intervene in Kosovo this year. There was a "never again" aspect to the Kosovo intervention because what had been happening in Kosovo before NATO started bombing in 1999 was not nearly on the same scale as what the Serbs had inflicted on Bosnia for two and a half years with our tacit permission. So a combination of guilt and fairly bad negotiating tactics delivered us in March of this year to a crossroad -- the point where either we carried out our threats or simply allowed the carnage to continue. And I think the decision was made without a great deal of introspection -- the use of force against Serbia was the only option left to us even if we had no UN authorization, and also, *mutatis mutandis*, bombing was the only available military option because the Dover Criterion forbade the use of ground troops. And even the bombing had to be carefully controlled so as not to create huge numbers of Serbian casualties and enlist the popular sympathy of the world on the side of the suffering Serbs.

Many professional military people knew this strategy was unlikely to drive Milosevic to the bargaining table. But the only war available was the air war. The only way to get 19 NATO

soldiers, but it was going to go ahead anyway. And it was becoming more and more clear to Milosevic that the Dover Criterion had been abandoned.

We were fortunate that Milosevic is only an opportunistic Serbian nationalist, and we were able to exploit this. (When I first met him in 1977, Milosevic's job as Serbian interior minister involved throwing Serbian nationalists in jail, a task he was performing with vigour and

But there is another genealogy to where we find ourselves at the turn of the millennium. There is the intellectual, the philosophical, and the legal background to all this, and that is a much older story.

We came out of the Second World War terrified by what had happened. It was the biggest war in history. There were 50 million direct fatalities, let alone people who died of

boundaries of your state. Sovereignty becomes more absolute and more legally guaranteed. And that is of course a charter custom-made for the world's tyrants. What it says is you can do anything you like to people within your borders so long as you don't frighten the neighbours. It was a devil's deal we had to make. We are the survivors of World War III; it didn't happen, and that is the only reason we are here.

But then in 1948 we wrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we supplemented it with specific international treaties banning genocide. And these oblige us to intervene in the internal affairs of states if they are engaged in genocidal activities; they create the legal supposition that there are certain actions no state is entitled to take in terms of abusing human rights. Now if you feel that there is a certain contradiction between the promise of absolute sovereignty in 1945 and the Convention on Genocide in 1948 which creates the legal obligation for states to intervene to stop genocide, you're absolutely right. They are totally contradictory, but every state that mattered signed both documents. We didn't bother about the enormity of the paradox at the time; we just got the signatures and carried on. And it's hard to blame the people involved for doing that. The point was to get it signed. We'll deal with the contradictions later. This is important, and the time is right now. Nobody in 1948 is going to refuse to sign a convention against genocide, maybe we won't be able to enforce it for a while, but it will be there. Their signatures will still be there when conditions change.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and associated treaties didn't get a lot of use in the subsequent 40 years because the world was in survival mode. This was lifeboat time. We felt we could not afford to put a lot of emphasis on human rights during the Cold War; we feared that if we pushed that issue too far we faced the real possibility of a nuclear exchange.

undermine the other pillar of international law -- that which outlaws war and which has been the basis of our survival?

Frankly, I do not think we should worry much about "imposing our values" on other cultures. I don't know of any religion or any culture that thinks killing innocent civilians is a good thing. We are not dealing with fine moral distinctions here; we are dealing with actions that any society must find intolerable. Can we seriously consider overlooking organized rape, maiming, and mass murder -- out of cultural sensitivity? This is not a case of pushing Western values. This is a case of universal values which are, after all, entrenched in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that practically every nation signed half a century ago. The thing to remember is: governments often have a problem with this; people don't.

The second issue is much more troubling. Do we have the will and the attention span to continue with these operations? This is a central issue, because in all probability there will be

will have to do this in the future if we are going to understand what we're getting into and come to a consensus about the risks and the costs.

So, for the world's most powerful nation and the crucial partner in any major intervention, 500 dead soldiers will be acceptable. In the thick of the Second World War, the Americans often found themselves losing 500 soldiers each day. During that conflict Canada sacrificed about 50 of our people every day for four years, and very few said we should just quit

centre. Of course this bit of stagecraft resulted in the deaths of innocent people, but we did it to create some news, to create the impression that the air offensive was moving along, was not in a rut.

Collectively, the media have become a pretty voracious beast, and one that is not very discriminating or intelligent in its eating habits. And there's a real and lasting problem of the discontinuity between media time cycles and the time it takes to do something serious like conduct a military operation in a foreign country. So humanitarian interventions will face the permanent peril of the media either getting bored and wandering off or raising all sorts of false or misleading issues simply because they do not have anything else to talk about.

Remembering the Forgotten War

We face an interesting and rather tricky passage over the next few years if we continue along this path. But there is one major consolation: perhaps it will not be necessary to undertake very many of these military interventions. If there is one thing about interventions as large and impressive as Kosovo, it's that they really do get the donkey's attention. There are a lot of dictators and juntas in the world, and they have grown used to being left to their own devices. But in the wake of East Timor and Kosovo they may be inclined to be more careful about their domestic policies.

We must not forget the impact of a very old and impressive lesson to tyrants. Five years after all those signatures were put on the UN Charter, North Korea invaded South Korea in a premeditated and unprovoked effort to annex it. And by a happy coincidence the Soviets were boycotting the Security Council at the time, and so it was possible to get a resolution

condemning North Korea under Chapter 7, which obliged every member of the United Nations to provide military forces to put the border back where it was. During that three-year conflict, over a million Koreans died, maybe several million. The Americans lost nearly 55,000 soldiers. We Canadians suffered 1,500 dead and wounded. But we put the damn border back where it had been. Now this is not something we would have liked to do every few years since, but the point is we didn't have to do it again for forty years, until 1990 when Saddam Hussein, who reads very little history, was foolish enough to try the same thing. He rolled his tanks across the Kuwaiti border one morning out of the blue, understanding that he was merely doing the sort of thing states have done since the time of Ramses. What he did not grasp was that this is now illegal, and once again the international community intervened and put the border back where it had been. Perhaps this sort of thing only has to be done every forty years or so -- so that even the most thick-headed tyrant can get the message.

There is no guarantee we will get the same mileage from the Kosovo effort. But all over the world, dictators who had grown used to being left alone are feeling much less comfortable these days, particularly because other elements of international law are now kicking in and threatening them from all sorts of new directions. They have seen the creation last year of an international criminal court whose purpose is to be a standing body -- not an ad hoc body like the international tribunals on Bosnia and Rwanda, but a full-spectrum permanent international criminal court whose purpose is to try government officials on human rights charges. Suddenly the international community is talking about its legal right to reach within a sovereign state and pluck out those individuals who have abused human rights to a sufficient degree to warrant the court's attention. Certainly General Pinochet felt he had nothing to fear when he stepped off a plane in London a year ago; he didn't expect to be there today facing an extradition hearing

related to human rights abuses against Spaniards in Chile during his rule. That would not have happened ten or even five years ago.

And consider the case of one of the Cold War's great political ogres, Mengistu Haile Mariam, who consolidated his power in Ethiopia in the late '70s after the convenient assassination of several rivals. From 1977 to 1991 Mengistu's Marxist regime fought with neighbouring states, committed wholesale massacres among the Ethiopian middle class, and was responsible for somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 executions in Addis Ababa alone, let alone the hundreds of thousands killed in his ineptly executed and pointless wars, and the countless people who died during Ethiopia's horrific famine years because the government was too corrupt, incompetent, and suspicious of foreigners to distribute foreign aid effectively. Finally, Mengistu fled the country in May 1991, and settled into a cosy life of exile in Zimbabwe, courtesy of his friend Robert Mugabe, a catholic Marxist. And here Mengistu lived comfortably through the rest of the decade, spending his time running up enormous phone bills -- until a few months ago. Suddenly Mengistu has left sunny southern Africa and moved to North Korea, where the climate is as bad as the food, but the likelihood of being nabbed by an international court is significantly reduced. In the old days, the worst that could happen to someone like Mengistu is that he would be bought off or forced to flee with his plundered loot and settle into luxurious retirement. But the club of tyrants is beginning to realize that very soon there may be no place to hide.

Creeping Democracy: When There's No One Left to Fight

This all sounds rather optimistic, but there is a significant cloud on the otherwise hopeful dawn of the twenty-first century. What about the danger that a reinvigorated commitment to human rights will undermine the vital UN pillar that is respect for national sovereignty? I think that danger is real. Ignoring the UN and then sneaking back under its skirts at the end of the day is a strategy that worked in Kosovo, but it is not recommended for repeat performances. On the other hand, the risk of international war between states is probably less than it has ever been in human history, and there is a very understandable reason for that. Between the mid-1980s and now we have seen an avalanche of democratization. We have gone from a world that was about one-third "democratic" (granted we are not setting the democracy bar very high here) to about two-thirds of the world's people living under more or less democratic governments now. The situation is totally transformed in eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union. Russia is a democracy, albeit a highly imperfect one. Throughout Latin America the dictators have been dumped, and we have seen tremendously positive changes in South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, and all through eastern and southeastern Asia. Perhaps three quarters of states are now democratic. (In fact there's only one large tyranny left -- China.) And one thing this very bloody century has taught us is that democratic countries typically do not go to war with each other. It is an observable historical fact. And so we are simply running out of states with whom to have wars.

So if there was ever a time when it was reasonably safe to run such a massive experiment with humanitarian international law, the time is now. No guarantees on this one. We are running a risk here. We are conducting an experiment without a control. But the game is worth a candle, I

couldn't trust as far as you could throw -- is trying to move from a world where international law protects governments to a world where international law protects people, and that includes protecting people from governments. I think that is worth a try.