

Can Wars Be Proportional?
Posted On: January 01, 1970

If columnist Amy Goodman had covered the carpet-bombing of Germany in World War II, she would have indignantly defended the Nazis. Fortunately for the outcome of that war, the public did not get a play-by-play description from observers who want war to be proportional.

Throughout 10,000 years of human history, wars were never proportional. Winners won. Chivalry plays no role in warfare.

In history, total conquest was used when repeated conflicts between warring parties could not end otherwise. Ancient Greece fought a ten-year war with the Trojans that cost both sides dearly. The war ended when the Greeks tricked the Trojans into accepting their departing gift, a gigantic wooden horse, concealing soldiers. Troy fell, with the usual results: total slaughter of all males and captivity for all females. The Greeks never had another war with Troy.

Rome had repeated wars with Carthage (Phoenicians) which came to an end with a final war of unconditional surrender, resulting in the slaughter of all males and captivity of females. Carthage never rose again.

In our own Civil War, the South wanted to negotiate an "honorable surrender," but President Lincoln refused to consider it. He knew that unconditional surrender was the only way to permanently end any attempt to secede from a unified United States again. It was brutal, but was the right decision.

World War II ended in unconditional surrender. It was exceedingly disproportionate; far more Germans and Japanese died than Americans or British. Unconditional surrender is certainly far more deadly than negotiated truces, but it has the benefit of ending that conflict for all time. World War I ended in an armistice, and morphed into a far worse World War II. Bad choice.

The Dresden bombing raids of 1945 were horrific. So many incendiaries were used that the entire city, once the most beautiful city in Europe, had fire-storms that sucked up all the oxygen. Most of the population died by asphyxiation. No reporter observed this.

The British airmen, some reluctant to destroy beautiful Dresden, nonetheless remembered who started that war. The Nazis began with the total destruction of Britain's Coventry, Rotterdam in the Netherlands; and Warsaw in Poland. The Germans were the first European power to take the war to civilian populations, a giant step beyond the trench warfare of World War I. The Japanese had already introduced this horror in China.

Both the carpet-bombing of Germany and the atomic bomb destructions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were necessary because the Nazis and the Japanese were unwilling to surrender unconditionally. Had the war lasted another year or two, many millions more people would have died, many our own.

How many times have the Israelis put up with shelling from Hamas in Gaza? Truces have not stopped this campaign, merely permitting Hamas more time to re-arm. These two cultures are not equivalent. Hamas has spent its money on digging tunnels, buying and making missiles, and totally ignoring their responsibilities to govern a civilian population. Israel is a vibrant modern democracy.

Israel cannot do what Greece or Rome did, nor what the Allies did in World War II. The rules have changed. We have not fought a major war to win since World War II, with unfortunate consequences (Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and even the Cold War). However, the Israelis must break this cycle of belligerence once and for all if they can. They are dismantling the hundreds of tunnels used to hide missiles or to smuggle war materials or terrorists into Israel.

This conflict will not end in genocide or unconditional surrender. But the latest bout between the Israelis and Palestinians is so awful that there can only be one satisfactory outcome: the decision of the Palestinians to choose life, not death; to choose a modern culture over a death-cult. If they do this, Israel will not need disproportionate force to live with them as a neighbor.

Imagine how the US would respond to Mexico if they were shelling San Diego. Would our response be proportional? Would Amy Goodman defend Mexico? Her handwringing over

vicious underdogs is predictable.

674 words

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