

Can We Ever Force Peace on Combatants?
Posted On:December 31, 1969

Register Pajaronian

Historically there are two ways to end war: one side triumphs and the other side surrenders\227or they forge an armistice or truce. A third way to end war is for a third party to impose a resolution on the parties. This can work only if both parties know they have been defeated and have no other option.

In ancient Greece and Rome, when conflicts reached the point of all-out war, the winning side would seize loot as reparations, kill all men and boys, and take all women and girls into slavery. The Greeks did this in Sicily when they fought with the Phoenicians, their competitors for power. One remnant of this struggle can be seen in a once Phoenician town called Moyta, a city of some size that had been totally leveled in one day, its males slaughtered and females enslaved. Archeology can bring such history to life (see Gaia Servadio, *Motyta: Unearthing a Lost Civilization*, Phoenix Paperback, 2001).

In the Trojan War, made memorable in *The Odyssey* and *The Trojan Women*, the stories follow the fall of Troy, the murder of all males, and the enslavement of all the women.

The Romans had the same policy in all-out war. During their Republican period, however, they usually tried to negotiate before fighting\227and then attempted to turn former enemies into allies (as did the Persian Empire of antiquity and the US in our time in Germany and Japan). However, if they had continuous rebellions and difficulties, Rome reverted to the ancient code\227total destruction, execution of males and enslavement of females (Carthage), or\227exiling of most of the population from their homeland (Judea).

When the Prophet Mohammad was engaged in warfare in Arabia to establish his new religion, the same ancient Mediterranean code was carried out\227with one change. If the conquered people agreed to accept the new religion, they were spared. If not, the males were murdered and females enslaved.

The Mongols in the 13th century went one step further: if a town refused to surrender, the Mongols took no prisoners. They leveled the town, destroyed the water works, and sowed salt so that nothing could grow there again. There are whole swaths of eastern Iran where the remnants of such destroyed towns can still be seen.

What about ending wars with armistices or truces? World War I was ended that way\227and unfortunately the losers, the Germans, defied their agreements and rearmed for all-out war, World War II. The Korean War ended with a truce too\227with the same problem: one side abandoned war and opted for development instead (South Korea); the other side continues to be a grave threat to the entire region. Truces apparently are only stop-gaps, not ends to a conflict.

In the Middle Ages, warring armies declared truces only to give each side time to collect and bury their dead. Medieval European wars went on until one side definitively conquered the other\227and then did what they liked with the vanquished.

Since the advent of the United Nations, with its laudable purpose of creating a peaceful world, wars that have involved the West (Korean and Vietnam Wars) have ended in indecisive peace agreements\227armistices. The Iraq and Afghan wars have also ended in the modern way\227the indecisive mode in which the losers never understand that they have lost. These rules have been even less successful with Congo, Sudan, and Rwanda, committers of genocide, who did what they pleased.

And what of the Arab-Israeli wars\227in most cases when Israel was attacked by much larger and more numerous enemies? Israel, which won all of these conflicts, ended with truces imposed on them by third parties\227the UN or the US.

Even with countries of good will, truces are dicey. But when the combatants are Islamic militants who adhere to the Koranic notion of perpetual war until they prevail, their truces are not meant to be trusted. If the US imposes such a \223peace\224 on the Israelis and Palestinians, they may one day regret this choice.

672 words

Laina Farhat-Holzman is a writer, lecturer, and historian. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink