

# Why are wars becoming more domestic?

Why are wars becoming more domestic? Or are they even becoming more domestic? John Mueller argues that they are not, but claims that domestic warfare is the residual form of warfare in an increasingly peaceful world. Thus, with the absolute number of wars receding, and most of the decline in international warfare, the percentage of domestic wars increases compulsorily.

Why is the world becoming more peaceful? Is it becoming more peaceful? Writing in 1992, Francis Fukuyama concluded that “the end of history as such” had arrived. The end of the Cold War had freed the world from the looming danger of a Third World War. The increasing universalization of Western liberal democracy “as the final form of human government” was and is progressing promisingly – today, about 62% of the world’s 192 nations are democracies featuring universal suffrage, and even though recent exceptions exist (Nepal, Kyrgyzstan), it appears as if the world is becoming more democratic, liberal and thus peaceful. To a certain degree, Northern institutions as the World Bank, IMF or more recently, the WTO have actively created this world. Development aid was and still is tied to convictions similar to those of Cordell Hull, U.S. Secretary of State from 1933 to 1944, who believed that the fundamental causes of the two world wars lay in trade warfare and economic discrimination. Regarding this context, NY Times columnist Thomas Friedman developed his “Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention”, arguing that the globalization of fast-food giant McDonald’s is a good indicator for the spread of perpetual peace. As “people would rather buy hamburgers than take up arms” and no two countries with McDonald’s stores have ever gone to war (except NATO’s invasion of Yugoslavia, which occurred after the theory’s publication), the spread of the Big Mac equals the spread of peace. However, at the same time as war as “a state of widespread conflict between states” (Wikipedia) has become nearly extinct, state failures, especially in the developing world, have sustained the frequency of domestic warfare.

It is even questioned whether many of today’s domestic wars even ought to qualify as such, as the “true essence” of warfare is often missing. The true essence, in this context, means the willingness of one group not just to kill, but also to accept death in return. Additionally, some kind of directing, governmental structure is needed, and the achievement of “societal issues with the interest of resolving them by force”. As most contemporary, domestic wars are fought by “bands of thugs”, often trained by nothing but the repetitious showings of mediocre movies featuring Sylvester Stallone and friends, most wars more closely resemble “criminal civil conflicts” than warfare in the traditional sense. Stallone, in accordance with typical, military procedures, wears no shirt for 62% of his 138 kills in Rambo I – III and endures a combined total of 74 sequences of being shot at

These “band of thugs”, or modern-day “bandit and pirate bands”, are often small in number, but satisfied with terrorizing the mostly unarmed and unorganized civilians within their stomping grounds. The perceived “war” often is of extreme use, and involved parties might show a tendency to avoid potentially deciding battles, as the end of war could equal the end of prosperity. Many combatants are low paid, rely on their lootings to make a “killing”, and receive personal satisfaction from murdering and raping.

Recent episodes of limited anarchy after hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans (September 2005) explain how “criminal civil conflicts” are fuelled by the absence of effective governments. True, the warlords and freed inmates often composing parties in domestic conflicts of failed states were missing, but nevertheless, a society freed of the shackles of effective governmental forces lived out its potential for lootings, homicides and gang rapes almost immediately, while remaining civilians protected their properties by force. If it needs a few days for the Wild West to return to the flooded streets of New Orleans, it should come as no surprise that many failed governments, of which the CIA lists 113 cases between 1957 and 1994, laid out the seeds for domestic conflicts. Often, these conflicts feature four distinctive stages, namely “takeover, carnival, revenge, and occupation and desertion”.

Regrettably, “absolute power corrupts absolutely”, and especially the stage of “carnival” allow the often involved, sadistic minority of society to live out their stored up dreams, which often means that an entire society is held hostage by a perilous few. Paramilitary gangs, foreign mercenaries and convicted criminals get carried away with turning the social pyramid on its head, and most of what passes for warfare in these days is “centrally characterized by the opportunistic and improvisatory clash of thugs, not by the programmed and/or primordial clash of civilizations”. Disappointingly, human species seem to require some kind of controlling, powerful superstructure, with the Western, liberal nation-state appearing as the structure of choice.

In conclusion, wars have not become more domestic, but domestic warfare has not done humanity the favour of extinction, as international warfare increasingly, but not absolutely, has. International warfare often required inspiring leadership to call the masses to arms, whereas the absence of any such leadership leads those dangerous for society towards the arms. Unstable governments, arbitrarily designed nation states of the post-colonial era and vacuums of control inspire opportunistic gangs, wannabe-Rambos or warlords to seize control in the absence of effective checks. For many, the state of war has become a livelihood, which is why the total number of wars going on at any one time has increased over the past decades, whereas no rise in wars starting per year was observable. If the international community turns a blind eye, local warlords and their “troops” benefit, and domestic governments are not effectively in charge of their countries, the world cannot be freed from domestic conflicts.