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February 26, 2021

**Weak states and war**

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War is the most abominable act committed by a state and the most undesirable action to resolve interstate conflicts. Modern theories of international relations revolve around diplomatic means to resolve conflicts and attain peace without recourse to war.

International diplomacy is the art of preventing wars through negotiations and via quid pro quo between rival states. Diplomacy is a set of political and strategic instruments which states apply to meet their national interests by engaging the world around them and dissent within. Diplomacy is more about engaging an enemy than dining with a friend. War is usually an outcome of the failure of diplomacy to meet internal and external political and economic objectives.

The modern nation-state is a heterogeneous political institution composed of various socioeconomic classes and political groups with varying interests. The nation-state, nonetheless, primarily acts to protect the political and economic interests of its ruling class only. However, the state also acts to dissipate the revolutionary spirit of other classes by ensuring a continuous supply of residual benefits to the public at large. In doing so, the state also ensures that there is no internal strife to challenge the given political and economic order. In a nutshell, the prime objective of diplomacy is to maintain the status quo by dissuading the political forces which can potentially destabilize status quo. Diplomacy, therefore, is not equal to foreign policy; it is sophisticated, ideological, broad-based, strategic, long term and a combination of political instruments for engaging both internal and external threats to the status quo. Failure to engage the internal and external threats to the status quo leads to war which becomes a means of restoring the status quo by galvanizing popular support against the perceived internal/external threats.

War is a great political tactic to defeat internal threats more than destroying an external enemy. The history of war is the history of maiming internal dissent and is the act of an internally divided and weaker state. Some states even wage war against their own people to maintain the repressive political order; these are the weakest states of all.

Contrary to our perception of war being waged by powerful states, it is for the most part the act of weaker states. This sounds bizarre, doesn't it? Where on earth do weaker states wage wars and why? In our common sense understanding of politics, war is one of the lethal means of attaining political and economic objectives by those that are powerful. It is so true that it is about politics and economy and it is also inherent to our animalist will to dominate. But why would weaker states prefer war while it is obvious that peace is what guarantees their survival? People would jump to a conclusion by suggesting that the most wars were inflicted by the powerful empires of the world for dominance and controlling the resources. In recent times, the American empire has waged wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan to control strategic routes and natural resources and so on and so forth.

In order to understand how weaker states prefer war over peace, we need to deconstruct the notion of ‘power’ first. What is power and who holds it? Well power is neither about the number of warships and explosives in your arsenal nor only about your demographic number and geographical expanse. Power is more about having political arrangements of inclusivity and the ability of a state to win the hearts and minds of its citizens. It is about having the moral and political authority to maintain civil order without recourse to force. Power is about benign structural control without policing and spying on dissent. It is about providing spaces for individualistic and collective expression without dubbing citizens as traitors and anti-state.

Power seems to be diffused and dispersed – this is what the postmodernist would like us to believe – but in reality it is concentrated in a tyrannical order of institutions and structures which are erected to control hearts and mind more than the body. Power is not an absolute and brute force but is a mix of force, awe, fear, consent, submission, surrender, sharing and collusion accumulated through well-knit structures. Simply speaking, power enables a state to establish an order in that the citizens speak for the state and they act on behalf of the state to protect the interests of the ruling elite.

Powerful states are those in which citizens own the fear of state as a social contract and submit to the political narratives espoused by state functionaries. Having said that, submission to state ideology is not only a unilateral act of citizens, it is rather a quid pro quo between state and citizens. This means that the state can only draw its political legitimacy by granting concessions to citizens with visible actions of residual economic and political benefits to common people.

In this sense, welfare states are the most powerful, with the lowest vulnerability to fall to political riots and civil strife. Welfare states do not wage war but use the most sophisticated forms of diplomacy to establish legitimate rule through benign control of somewhat inclusive political institutions. So that makes Scandinavian states more powerful than the leading world economic giants like the US, China and Japan.

America has always waged wars against a carefully created enemy to prove its power and benevolence to the citizens. The ‘war on terror’ provided the rationale for American infiltration in the strategic and resource-rich regions of the world. America could restore its rapidly receding political dominance in the world due to this ‘war on terror’. The fear and demonic depiction of a perceived enemy in Islamic fundamentalism created a whole new narrative and hence the decreasing social protection was justified.

In the political history of war, even invasions by Mongols were directed to control internal tribal dissent and to unify feuding tribes for a larger cause to destroy the outsider. The weakening British Empire started to fear its colonial subjects and so it started to incarcerate critical thinkers in colonized India during the period between the First and Second World Wars.

The power of a modern state lies in constitutionalism, legality, equity, democracy and social justice. Smart politics is about protecting strategic, political and economic interests in favor of the status quo without waging a war. All modern institutions of governance are not strategic arrangements of control and subjugation without waging a war. When empires grow from being nation-states to global powers, they become overstretched and face enormous challenges to maintain the status quo without the use of brutal force.

Empires become vulnerable to internal dissent because they fail to cater to the emerging needs and expectations of citizens in a competing world for dominance. In their bid for expansion and domination, empires wage wars against an imagined external enemy to galvanize popular support. The weaker postcolonial states have been waging wars against their own citizens; and this is particularly true in the case of South Asian states including India and Pakistan.

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