

Justifying wars is nothing new

By Mubarak Ali

*Down War
25/5/03*

THUCIDIDES, the Greek historian, writing on wars of his time, points out that the main motive of war was to loot and plunder and not occupation of other's territory.

In the later period, when nations developed agriculture and trade and accumulated wealth and resources, victors not only occupied territories but forcibly acquired wealth of vanquished nation that was called as 'war booty'. Greed and thirst of more power led the foundation of great Empires such as the Roman, the Arabs, the Carolingian, the Mughals and the Ottomans. From 15th to 18th centuries, European countries such as Spain, Portugal, Britain and France assumed the role of great imperial powers by conquering and occupying Asian, African countries and the newly discovered world.

Whenever wars were fought, imperial powers always found some moral justification to legitimize them. People were needed some higher cause to sacrifice their lives; therefore, thinkers and religious scholars did this job by providing moral justification to kill and devastate to fulfil the divine mission. Whereupon, religion became the best tool to mobilize people to wage holy war for it. When a nation got to believe that its religion was true and all other were false, and they

argument was given by Abul Fazl, justifying the imperialist policy of the Mughals, that to be ruled by the Mughal meant a blessing to the lesser powers. Some historians, on this basis, give example of the Rajputs, who played very important role in the history by contributing the extension of the Mughal Empire; otherwise, they might have wasted their energies fighting against each other. Under the Mughals they became Empire builders and acquired a dignified place in history.

To justify devastation of war and killing of people, the Europeans, by adopting racial superiority and notion of civilization, dehumanized the conquered nations. They were presented as savages, barbarian, and sub-human. In this case to kill and enslave such people was justified. The superior nations felt no sense of guilt on the wide scale of massacre of the inhabitants of America, Australia, and New Zealand.

After occupying their territories, they exploited their natural resources and used them for their own benefit. Hitler, following the same concept and in believing the superiority of the Aryan race, argued that the Slav people were inferior and as they were not capable to use their natural resources, it was the right of the German nation to occupy their land and control their wealth for the advancement of civilization.

that its religion was true and all other were false, and they were followers of a faith which would prevail all over the world, it motivated them to kill nonbelievers in order to accomplish God's mission.

In the mediaeval period the concept of 'Just War' was evolved to justify killing in the name of religion. This is the reason that most of the wars of the mediaeval period were fought in the name of religion, though the ulterior motives were economic and political gains. Such as in the wars of Crusades, religion inspired people to fight. But behind the garb were the economic interests of the European merchants and traders who invested huge sum in support of these wars.

However, situation has changed in Europe when the institution of nation state emerged and secular ideas and thoughts undermined religious faith. Therefore, instead of religion, nation, and nation state acquired top most places in a society. Now, wars were waged in the name of nationalism. It was said that 'my country is right or wrong was my country'.

It meant that moral and ethical values had no place as far as interest of a country was concerned. Social Darwinism was the second inspiring theory that gave a sense of racial superiority to Europeans over other nations. As a superior and chosen nation it was their natural right to subdue and enslave weaker nations.

The arrogance of racial superiority led the British and the French to believe that they were the most civilized and cultured and as such it was their responsibility to civilize others. It was known as the 'white man's burden' or 'mission of civilization' in the imperial jargon.

The concept to civilize barbarians and backward nations after conquering and enslaving them is very old. For example, Pericles, the Greek ruler, wanted to conquer other nations in the name of civilization. It was his belief that these savage nations could become civilized only after living under the Greek rule. The same

their wealth for the advancement of civilization.

The Americans, after donning the mantle of imperialism, and following the concept of 'Manifest destiny' began the policy of occupation and extending their influence beyond their borders. Theodor Roosevelt, an American President, once said that he welcomed war because America needed it.

When Americans occupied the Philippine and it was asked as to what was the use of occupying the country as it was far from America? It was responded that the American navy would bring it closer to its border.

The Americans, when engaged in wars, justify their acts of aggression on the mediaeval as well as on modern concepts of morality. On one hand they regard their armed conflicts as just wars, believing that God is on their side. On the other hand, they call their wars, for the defence of civilization which was in danger. They believe that the Asian, African and Latin American countries could be civilized only under their control and by following their model. Therefore, American occupation and influence is blessing to them.

They also repeat the argument that non-European nations are not capable of using their natural resources for the development of humankind, whereupon, it is the right of the Americans as advanced and technological developed country to use these resources. This why they are trying to control oil from the Arab countries.

The Americans also believe that this century is 'the American century' and it is their responsibility to maintain sustainable peace in the world. Following the precedent of 'Pax Romana' in which the Romans, after crushing all rebellions, established a permanent peace. Americans assert that by waging relentless war against all those countries possessing weapon of mass destruction, they could establish peace. Pax Americana is the dream of the American ruling class which they determine to achieve. ■