

WAR, PEACE AND CIVILIZATIONS

Matthew Melko

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Wright State University, USA

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Summary

This essay attempts to explain the relationships between civilizations and war and peace. It describes three main political forms found within civilizations, how these forms shape political action, the kinds of war and peace that occur within these frameworks, how intercivilizational encounters relate to war and peace, and the relevance of some of these forms and relationships to the contemporary world.

1. Identifications

In order to discuss this rather broad set of relationships, it is probably desirable to limit the contexts. Definitions of war, peace and civilizations are all controversial, so rather than attempt them, it may be well to identify what is being considered here, and grant that each could be extended further.

War, as considered here, encompasses violent, physical conflict among political entities or among substantial factions within these entities. Peace is considered to be an absence of such violent conflict. It includes situations in which anger or hostility is openly expressed, and in which arms build-ups occur, if there is little physical conflict. A situation of mutual war preparation between potential adversaries who nevertheless do not fight would be a period of peace. The term cold war has been used to describe such a period, but it could as well be described as a cold peace. Situations in which there is a high rate of violence, as in some large cities, or episodes of terrorism occur, do not fit comfortably within either of these parameters. Still by almost any measure, peace is normal, and war exceptional.

As for civilization, attempts to define it by groups of critical thinkers usually fail. For the purposes of this essay, let us say that they are large societies possessing a degree of cultural autonomy, agriculture, literacy, cities, religion and government. They date back about six thousand years and have their origins along the Tigris-Euphrates and Nile rivers. There will be debates, however about the sequence and importance of the qualities mentioned or omitted and the extent to which they can be distinguished from primitive or nomadic societies. Today there is more agreement about the identity of these civilizations, and within sessions in 2000 and 2002 at meetings of the International Society in for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC), members accepted Mesopotamian, Egyptian, South Asian, East Asian, Greco-Roman, Japanese, Mesoamerican, Andean, Islamic, Byzantine and Western Societies as “mainstream” civilizations. Latin American and Jewish Civilization were accepted as being in this category at the annual meeting in 2005. Debates, for various reasons, continue concerning African, Russian, Iranian and Global Civilization.

This essay will focus mostly on the nine mainstreams accepted by members of the ISCSC as of 2002 and war and peace as they are believed to exist within and among these civilizations.

While predecessors can be found, most of the writing about war and peace within or among civilizations has occurred during or since the twentieth century.

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