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Modern liberal wars, illiberal allies, and peace as the failure of policy

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ABSTRACT

The post-Cold War period nearly up to the present has been characterised as the age of liberal wars, yet key facets of the liberal guidance of war remain under appreciated. This article seeks to address this wider gap with regard to the particular concern of war termination and the fulfilment or failure of policy. First, it develops characterisations of liberal wars based on the existing literature, identifying three broad types through consideration of context—defensive versus offensive—and of political and strategic agency, particularly regarding the motives for and intents of action. Three types of liberal wars result: defensive liberal wars, offensive liberal wars with humanitarian motive and geopolitical intent, and offensive liberal wars with geopolitical motive and humanitarian intent. The article then presents one exemplary case for each liberal war with an emphasis on how liberal strategy required an illiberal ally and that ally's effect on the subsequent peace.

KEYWORDS

Liberalism; war; strategy; peace; policy; failure

Liberal theory has historically assumed that peace is the natural and right condition of humanity, and wars are but egregious and tragic episodes outside the norm. This straightforward understanding fails to recognise that various liberal values may not only be mutually contradictory, but may even result in the real or perceived need to wage war, either to defend or to promote those same liberal values. This leads to liberal war, an ironic concept developed to grapple with the relationship between force and policy in the liberal conscience; that is, between liberal ends and the illiberal ways of war which may be required – or seem to be required – to achieve those ends. Yet much of the depths and nuances of the relationship between liberalism and the conduct of war remain to be plumbed.

One still unexplored concern is how effectively liberal strategists are able to fulfil, through war, the policies demanded by liberalism, the foremost of which is peace. Yet any eventual peace codifies not just liberal policy achieved through war, but also the failures of liberal policies caused by the vagaries of warfare and other necessary wartime policy modifications. Unrealistic policy rarely survives the test of war. This is not a new problem for either strategy or policy. It is, however, particularly salient in the context of liberal wars, which are meant to improve the human condition in some way. One of

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the notable characteristics of modern liberal wars is that they are most often fought on behalf of others, who are themselves often illiberal and also send liberal policy awry. Hew Strachan has identified this problem in a recent article, where he notes that liberal reliance on local allies has “effectively separated the waging of war from [the liberals’] own political objectives, and so deprived themselves of the opportunity of shaping the outcome; which an army on the ground could help provide.”¹ The resulting deflections of humanitarian policy are rarely beneficial and serve to discourage the practice of liberal wars.

This article starts by considering liberalism and various political objectives which it may engender. This is followed by characterisations of liberal wars, both by context – defensive versus offensive – and by political and strategic agency, particularly regarding the motives for and intents of action. Three broad configurations of political and ideological motivations and intentions result: defensive liberal wars, offensive liberal wars with humanitarian motive and geopolitical intent, and offensive liberal wars with geopolitical motive and humanitarian intent. While the outcomes of liberal wars typically fail to satisfy the hopes of liberals, each type of liberal war fails in its own distinct way. These failures manifest themselves in part because of the pressures of war, but equally due to the liberal tendency to ally with illiberal polities. Often these illiberal allies are either necessary for the prosecution of the war, or the war itself is actually being fought *for* them.

Liberalism and policy

Liberalism has been inextricably bound to the concept of peace for most of its existence as a political ideology. The original linkage between the two was made by Immanuel Kant, who argued that the first of three definitive articles of perpetual peace was the requirement that “the civil constitution of every state shall be republican.” Such a constitution, Kant argued,

is established, first, according to principles of the *freedom* of the members of a society (as human beings), second, according to principles of the *dependence* of all on a single, common legislation (as subjects), and third, according to the law of the *equality* of the latter (as *citizens of the state*).²

This was a notion most recently revived in the form of democratic peace theory, interpreted by some scholars as *liberal* peace theory. Liberals thus see a direct connection between liberalism as an ideology and peaceful international relations, even if that peace is contingent upon all of its parties being republican, democratic, or liberal.

Most liberals since the nineteenth century have traditionally believed that liberalism is also indirectly bound to peace through free trade and commerce, and, increasingly, globalisation – all causes historically championed by liberalism. This argument seemingly preceded liberalism but soon became inseparable from it. Although throughout the nineteenth-century liberals nearly endlessly debated about free trade and the degree to which government intervention is justifiable or desirable, they all fundamentally believed that relatively free trade encouraged peace among nations, unlike the mercantilist policies of preceding centuries which were pilloried as inherently enabling war to occur because such policies were in the interests of only a narrow aristocratic ruling class. Men such as British free trade proponent Richard Cobden believed “that peace would be the

natural consequence of the growth of international commerce and self-government, since it would increase the influence of those classes which, unlike the old ruling elites, had no interest in the perpetuation of war.”³

These two key direct or indirect ingredients for liberal peace, of republican or liberal constitutions and of free and even globalised trade, have led to the bifurcation of the concept of peace between “negative” and “positive” peace. Negative peace is simply the absence of sustained violence, a concept which has been often criticised by proponents of positive peace. For example, it has been suggested that

[n]egative peace uses a short-term time horizon, which reinforces a tendency to see the job as complete once the fighting stops. It undermines efforts for a broader peace by freezing the status quo, and it potentially leaves the door open for human rights abuses to continue unabated.⁴

Positive peace most closely resembles liberal peace. Johan Galtung, the Norwegian scholar who coined the term positive peace, originally defined it as “the integration of human society.”⁵ Positive peace has never dominated the peace research agenda; negative peace virtually always formed the bulk of the scholarship.⁶ Nonetheless, elaborations of positive peace have proliferated over time. “These positive visions of peace incorporate a host of concepts and values such as justice, democracy, sympathy, cooperation, effectiveness, freedom, engagement, order, harmony, and collaboration.”⁷ Of course, these are all politically contingent features. Positive peace is not merely a concept of peace but a concept of politics as a whole.

Ever since Immanuel Kant wrote on perpetual peace, positive peace has represented the ultimate liberal ideal of peace – and, implicitly, of politics – as well as the end of history as a story of human progress. Within the liberal West, it has also become the most familiar kind of peace and, by extension, therefore also the most familiar form of politics. Yet this has also led to a conceptual muddling of what peace and politics actually are, as opposed to what they ideally are, leading in turn to the occasional use of flawed logic when discussing peace. Thus Paul Diehl, in discussing the relations between North and South Korea or between Israel and Iran, scoffs at the notion that they are at peace: “The idea that the Korean peninsula and the Iranian-Israeli relationship are just as ‘peaceful’ as contemporary French-German or United States-Canadian relations defies common sense.”⁸ This is a logical non sequitur, where peace as such becomes “as peaceful as.” This perceptual and logical flaw matters for policy because the logic may be reversed and “as peaceful as” simply becomes peace in the minds of the liberal policy-makers who are unused to any other character of peace and therefore are inclined to believe in the naturalness of the politics inherent in positive peace. Francis Fukuyama’s thesis on the end of history remains the most prominent example of this automaticity of positive peace. For example, Fukuyama attests that

[t]here are currently over 20,000 Chinese students studying in the U.S. and other Western countries, almost all of them the children of the Chinese elite. It is hard to believe that when they return home to run the country they will be content for China to be the only country in Asia unaffected by the larger democratizing trend.⁹

Fukuyama sees the process as automatic: exposure inherently leads to agreement, to reform, and ultimately to an expanded zone of liberal peace. No deviation in process can affect the final outcome in anything other than timing.

Yet liberalism also holds dear other values beyond peace, such as free trade, the rights of the individual, and the self-determination of peoples. These values, particularly the rights of the individual and how they may relate to the self-determination of peoples, often belong to the politics of outrage, i.e. some form of outrage is the only appropriate response if the rights of the individual, if human rights, are violated. Many of the greatest nineteenth-century liberal politicians and theorists recognised this: “Lincoln and Gladstone understood liberal outrage. So, Utilitarian though he was, did Mill. In his *Autobiography* Mill singled out amongst the many admirabilities of his wife, Harriet Taylor, ‘a burning indignation at everything brutal or tyrannical’. You are a strange sort of liberal if you cannot give in to indignation and outrage.”¹⁰

Yet indignation and outrage often threatens peace, as this purely emotional response translates politically into a call for action, that “something must be done” to relieve the plight of the victims – often a military response. Ironically, despite their undying love of peace, liberals repeatedly have gone; and still go, to war. In certain circumstances, liberal values become contradictory and mutually exclusive; to maintain one value it becomes mandatory to abandon another temporarily. This leads to difficulties in ending wars, as it becomes increasingly problematic to satisfy all policy objectives as they proliferate.

Liberalism and war

Although the liberal practice of war is as old as liberalism itself, scholarly attempts to understand how liberalism affects military strategy are fairly recent. The term that developed to encapsulate the idea of liberals waging war is “liberal war,” apparently first employed by John M. Owen. Owen saw liberal peace and liberal war as intimately connected, each dependent upon the other. Liberalism needs an ideological “other” against which to define itself. Liberal peace exists because there are liberal wars to be fought and liberal wars are fought to protect, or expand, the liberal peace. The latter provide limits to the former, as liberal wars are fought to punish illiberal polities for threatening peace and liberal values, or to compel them to convert.¹¹ After Owen’s 1997 inauguration of the concept, liberal war lay largely unheeded for nearly a decade.

Only from the mid-2000s did the idea of liberal wars enjoy further conceptual development from Lawrence Freedman, who identified the post-Cold War era as “the age of liberal wars.” Freedman judged that this age got off to a slow start, with non-intervention in Rwanda and a hesitant one in Bosnia, and reached its zenith with the three wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq in 1999, 2001, and 2003, respectively. Kosovo appeared as the apex of the practice of liberal wars because Freedman utilised a two-dimensional set of criteria for judging whether a war is or is not liberal. First, such wars must be

conducted in pursuit of a humanitarian agenda, and which are likely to lead to pressures for domestic political reform and reconstruction ... The ideal type for a liberal war is that it is altruistic in inspiration and execution. Such a war would focus on the balance of power within a state rather than between states, and can be presented as rescuing whole populations, or particularly vulnerable sections, from tyrannical governments or social breakdown.¹²

Second

[l]iberal wars are not pursued in the name of strategic imperatives but because values are being affronted. Interests might be involved at the margins, but these are unlikely to count

as “vital”, except in the most enlightened terms. For this reason, liberal wars have acquired a discretionary aspect, to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.¹³

Freedman soon recognised that such a stark definition was too restrictive and at odds with history and so further developed the concept of liberal wars by differentiating between defensive, and offensive, liberal wars. The former “are undertaken in the face of threats to liberal values”; he cited both World Wars and the Cold War as examples. Offensive wars, by contrast, “are designed to bring liberal values to parts of the world where they are not yet in evidence.”¹⁴ His identified age of liberal wars may more accurately have been labelled the age of offensive liberal wars, which came hard on the heels of an age of defensive liberal wars which spanned the twentieth century from the First World War to the Gulf War. To differentiate its two forms this dichotomy of liberal wars depends upon policy questions. A liberal war is offensive, or defensive, depending upon whether the survival of liberal ideas or the integrity of liberal honour are, or seem to be, at stake.

Neither following a humanitarian agenda, nor eschewing strategic imperatives, defensive liberal wars do not fit Freedman’s early strict criteria. National survival, a vital geopolitical imperative, was at stake in the two greatest defensive liberal wars; yet national survival coincided with the global vitality of liberal values, for it was the proprietors of those values whose survival as independent countries was at stake. The importance of both survival and liberal vitality is reflected in the degree to which each subsequent defensive liberal war of the past century escalated in brutality for the purposes of victory. The Western Allies waged a siege war by military attrition, and by naval blockade, during the First World War, added relentless bombing campaigns to their arsenal during the Second World War, and planned to fight the Third, should the Cold War have turned hot, by the megaton and megadeath. Most of these forms of offensive operations tend to punish the enemy’s civilian population as much as, if not actually more than, its military forces, partly as an attempt to alleviate the liberal belligerent’s experience of battlefield slaughter and military casualties as much as possible. Despite this attempt to minimise outright combat, defensive liberal wars are stark incarnations of Freedman’s recurrent note that liberal war is an inherently oxymoronic concept because warfare is naturally illiberal.¹⁵

One of the most important escalatory options available to liberal states are illiberal allies; that is, allies for whom casualties are not as politically sensitive. Defensive liberal wars are nearly universally marked by alliance with illiberal belligerents despite; or perhaps because of, the fact that these are wars waged to ensure the survival of liberal political values. However, involving illiberal allies in defensive liberal war also inevitably affects the ensuing peace after victory. Winston Churchill’s infamous phrase demonstrated the typical liberal desperation for illiberal allies in such dire defensive wars for survival: “If Hitler invaded hell I would at least make a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.” Not all defensive liberal wars are so desperate as to require targeting the civilian population directly; but nearly, if not actually, all have involved illiberal coalition partners or even outright allies.

Offensive liberal wars differ from their defensive counterparts, both in purpose and in strategy. The purpose of offensive liberal wars ideally has been to spread liberalism or, failing that, at least to protect a population under assault from its own government. Often, the latter political purpose transforms into the former, albeit not necessarily

during the war itself. Kosovo is an example of such political and policy change; what began as a war to prevent the ethnic cleansing of ethnic-Albanian Kosovars became a longer-term liberalisation mission under the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, and later the European Union's Rule of Law Mission. This purpose has an effect on strategy. Whereas in defensive liberal wars, liberal propriety has often been cast aside in favour of outright victory, the opposite tendency prevails for offensive liberal wars. Freedman has described ideal liberal strategy in an offensive war.

Intolerance of casualties and of collateral damage meant targeting military assets rather than innocent civilians and no resort to weapons of mass destruction. On this basis, the military would be kept separate from the civil, combatants from non-combatants, firepower from society, and organized violence from everyday life. Warfare could move away from high-intensity combat to something more contained and discriminate, geared to disabling an enemy's military establishment with the minimum necessary force. Opponents would be defeated by means of confusion and disorientation rather than slaughter. If this trend could be pushed far enough, then it was possible at some point to envisage a war without tears, conducted over long distances with great precision with as few people as possible – preferably none at all – at risk. No more resources should be expended, assets ruined or blood shed than absolutely necessary to achieve specified political goals. This was the closest imaginable to a liberal military strategy.¹⁶

This ideal is reflected in both modern US strategic theory and preferred practice. John Warden's conceptualisation of air power as targeting five rings is an example of this confluence; the innermost ring, comprising leadership targets, is considered the most important and most consequential. Similarly, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, characterised by shock and awe, similarly intended to cause psychological dislocation rather than physical destruction.

Yet whereas Freedman identifies one ideal, in practice how offensive liberal wars end up being fought differs between two main patterns. Thus, Kosovo and Iraq both were, or turned into, offensive liberal wars, but the way in which they were waged differed significantly. Here Freedman's work requires further development. His defensive/offensive distinction identifies the threshold at which liberal values in strategy are abandoned in favour of the straightforward pursuit of military victory in the name of liberalism, but it has little to say about how liberalism influences strategy in discretionary offensive liberal wars. His original strict criteria concerning the constitution of liberal wars – a humanitarian agenda and no strategic imperatives – similarly offer no path to understand variation in strategic practice.

Nonetheless, to unravel how liberal values shape strategy, one must return to Freedman's initial criteria of a liberal war: a humanitarian agenda and no strategic imperatives. He assumes a natural conflict between the two, but his original discussion conflates motives and intent: *why* one wishes to act, and *what* one intends to accomplish.¹⁷ One may be impelled to act by a humanitarian disaster, yet the intent of that action may be geopolitical inasmuch as the intervener uses force to halt the enemy's ability to wield sovereign – but repressive – power within his own borders. Bosnia, Kosovo, and Libya are examples of this particular mixture of humanitarian motives and geopolitical purpose. Conversely, one may be motivated by geopolitical reasoning to intervene, yet intend to achieve one's goals through humanitarian or liberal improvement. Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq all turned into examples of geopolitical motive mixed with liberal

intentions, and, as fatigue set in, the United States turned away from this mixture in all three of those wars.

There is no particular reason to privilege motive over intent, or vice versa, in determining what is or is not a liberal war. Motive refers to the geopolitical, or ideological reason, for which one goes to war: *why* a strategic actor intervenes. Intent refers to the operational ways, and ends thereof, identified as necessary, or desirable, to achieve the political object: *what* a strategic actor will do or seek to achieve. To emphasise one over the other according to the case indicates two distinct ways by which liberalism influences modern strategy. Each of these ways uniquely reflects its motive and its intent throughout the process of strategy, from the choice of means to the operational ends chosen and the role, importance, and political leverage of indigenous allies. Only when motive and intent in war are split by a humanitarian/geopolitical divide, a condition applicable only to offensive wars, does the war classify as liberal. Interventions characterised by humanitarianism in both motive and intent are not wars for they are bound by the dictum first to do no harm in the strictest sense. If they turn violent, liberal commitment to the intervention may collapse, as occurred in Somalia. Wars characterised in both motive and intent by geopolitical considerations are not liberal, save in the case of major defensive liberal war where national – and therefore also ideological – survival is at stake.

Wars motivated by liberal humanitarian ideals may be characterised by their post-heroic strategic commitment, epitomised by much of the West's involvement in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Libya. In such cases, moral duty demands intervention, but strategic logic requires circumspection. Post-heroic warfare, a term invented by Edward Luttwak to characterise the West's eventual participation in the Bosnian War, fit the requirements of both morality and politics. It was waged in a casualty-averse manner, usually predominantly or even entirely by air power.¹⁸ However, it may be contrasted with Warden's preferences regarding his five identified target rings in that the outermost ring, the enemy's armed forces, became the primary target for NATO air power due to the need to stop those armed forces from otherwise running amok in Bosnia. Post-heroic warfare necessarily relies on coercion through destruction, or the threat thereof, as that coincides with the physical limit of air power's kinetic influence upon events on the ground. Ultimately, the liberal motivation is sufficient to impel action, but not to justify sacrifice of one's own countrymen to save the citizens of another country. The strategic intentions of the interveners may be fulfilled, relative to cost, as, or even more, effectively post-heroically than as with a direct commitment on the ground.

As in defensive liberal wars, allies in offensive liberal wars characterised by humanitarian motive and geopolitical intention are thus required to bear some, and in this category of offensive liberal wars often the brunt, of the fighting. This stems partially from military necessity: first, air power needs spotters on the ground to identify targets; second, an ally on the ground who must be fought prevents the enemy from simply hiding the most valuable, vulnerable, or active components of his armed forces. The fact that the liberal belligerent with a humanitarian motive is aiding a local political actor means that his ally is the weaker party in the war and cannot win on his own. In such wars, the ends pursued by both sides are absolute, with no compromise possible. The stronger party seeks the eradication of the weaker, and the weaker seeks independence, if not regime change. These local political actors are illiberal, but liberal interveners miss these features either because they

are focused on promoting self-determination, or the illiberal locals mask their illiberalness specifically to attract liberal support.

Wars motivated by geopolitical interests but characterised by liberal humanitarian intentions tend to become nation-building endeavours, as in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The geopolitical motive draws Western powers into places that they would rather not occupy, but feel the need somehow to manage due to interests being threatened. The overarching context of intervention fits within a broader theme such as fighting evil, whether Communism, terrorism, or simply an obnoxious dictatorship. The intent must, therefore, be to improve the political system within which the people reside. The liberal intent in these cases is to create viable and secure liberal democracies, because this result is believed to serve the wider liberal geopolitical interests of spreading the zone of liberal peace in sensitive and unstable regions. This often sparks a resistive insurgency. Warfare, although much of it remains enemy-centric, contains a significant trace of population-centric tactics not just to protect the people from the enemy, but also to promote Western revision of the local political system. The latter tendency, in particular, requires large-scale deployment of ground troops, although the strategic motives underpinning the intervention generally lead to their deployment even before a population-centric approach is deemed desirable. Ultimately, geopolitical motives are sufficient to induce both action and sacrifice, while the liberal intent colours the character of action on the ground and the meaning of any sacrifice entailed by that action.

These are wars waged explicitly to protect allies, illiberal but allegedly reforming, who cannot defend themselves effectively against domestic insurgencies. The relationship between liberal belligerent and illiberal ally in these wars is an uneven one, for the liberal belligerent has such a geopolitical interest in the success of his efforts that the illiberal ally, certain of the liberal belligerent's high threshold of disappointment, can extract many concessions and delay reform. In other words, these wars tend to be long and frustrating. Moreover, the liberal interventionists face a possibly irreconcilable dilemma over legitimacy which also hampers their efforts:

International forces thus face a dilemma. If they are to be successful at all and avoid being shot at by local actors, they must acquire legitimacy. However, in this process, they undermine the local state, thereby making their mission more difficult.¹⁹

The common military thread among these three types of warfare – defensive liberal, offensive liberal with humanitarian motive, or offensive liberal with geopolitical motive – is that the conduct of each by liberal belligerents is meant to ease, if not altogether eliminate, the commitment of ground forces and the inevitable resultant costs in blood and treasure. This common thread is due to the nature of liberalism itself, which is in part founded upon individual liberty and therefore is at odds with military virtues. Liberal states have a difficult time asking young men to sacrifice their lives before all reasonable measures are taken to ensure that they may not have to – both during peace before war and in war itself. In defensive liberal wars, the common thread comes through conventional and, ultimately, nuclear escalation, particularly against enemy civilian targets – albeit during the Cold War such hypothetical escalation also came to represent the failure of liberalism through mutually assured destruction. In offensive liberal wars with humanitarian motives this common thread manifests itself through the predominant application of air-power, and in offensive liberal wars with geopolitical motives by emphasis on population-

protection and support for local allies, who are meant eventually to carry the fight and to govern responsibly, in a liberal manner.

In line with the ultimate preference of liberalism, the common political goal for all three types of liberal war is peace. This peace is meant to be a better state of peace, ideally a liberal peace, which in liberal eyes is the best peace. In defensive liberal wars, peace must be defended against any transgressors, whose unworthy regimes must be punished and changed into democratic and hopefully liberal forms of government, thus expanding the zone of liberal peace. Offensive liberal wars motivated by humanitarian concerns aim to resuscitate peace in a particular region by preventing the continuation of humanitarian abuses, but they do not necessarily attempt to enforce liberal values outright among any of the belligerents after war – although they tend to be more successful in the political long-term when they do. Offensive liberal wars motivated by geopolitics aim to impose liberalism, and the peace it purportedly automatically entails, where little interest in such goals existed prior to geopolitical necessity. Peace is always the explicit aim of liberal wars, but in the liberal conscience it and liberalism are generally considered inseparable handmaidens. However, this primacy of peace as the objective of war leads to potential tension between peace as a policy objective and liberalism – with all its requisite cultural and governmental institutions – as a policy objective, especially when the relationships among these various concerns are thought to fulfil themselves automatically.

Throughout the twentieth century and to the present day, Western powers in liberal wars have frequently required allies to allow them to wage war how they wish – that is, with as few casualties as possible. Ironically, these allies tend to be illiberal in character; any liberal ally would be just as casualty-averse. Not only is war a profoundly illiberal activity, but liberal interventionists frequently wage it alongside of, and sometimes actually *for*, illiberal associates, who often mask their illiberalism to garner Western support. This partnership of liberal and illiberal belligerents affects the fruits of victory in virtually every liberal war, albeit in varying ways depending on the exact circumstances of the liberal war. This is especially the case when the liberal party is intervening abroad, as it will probably not remain there long, which ultimately leaves the actual political future of the territory in the hands of the illiberal ally. The end result is usually a disappointment, if not an outright failure, for liberalism.

Exemplary cases

The three types of liberal wars demonstrate varying liberal strategic preferences and varying interactions with allies who are often illiberal. Defensive liberal wars reveal the escalatory tendencies of liberal democracies at war, as well as their tendency to rely on illiberal allies to wage the bulk of the land warfare. Offensive liberal wars with humanitarian motivation, but geopolitical intent, are waged from the air, which maximises the physical security of the men sent to fight for their liberal polity, but weakens their ability actually to affect events on the ground, resulting in a demand for allies – who often themselves are experiencing the crimes which originally sparked the humanitarian impulse to intervene. Offensive liberal wars with geopolitical motivation, but liberal tendencies are waged on the ground with significant numbers of troops: the motives are politically important enough to justify sacrifice, and the intent requires large numbers of personnel both to provide security to the local population, and to fight the enemy. In such wars the ally is by

definition illiberal as it is reforming – or being pushed by the liberal belligerent to reform – toward liberal democratic ideals. Three exemplary cases of these wars and of their unique liberal belligerent-illiberal ally interactions are, respectively, the Second World War, the Kosovo War, and the Iraq War.

The Second World War is a prime example in defensive liberal war of both the reliance on illiberal allies to bear the main combat burden – at least on land – and that illiberal ally's effect on the subsequent peace. The liberal effort to court the Soviet Union as an illiberal ally against Nazi Germany began in the summer of 1939, when the Western Allies, albeit half-heartedly and ultimately futilely (given the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), tried to entice the Soviet Union into a coalition against Germany. Eventually, liberal policy to ally with the Soviet Union succeeded, albeit primarily because the Germans themselves invaded the Soviet Union and made it their enemy, throwing the Soviets into the waiting coalition arms of the liberal West.

Once the Soviet Union was involved in the war against Germany, liberal policy strove to maintain both Soviet capacity to wage it and Soviet interest in the war, through Lend-Lease, and eventually by answering Soviet calls for a Second Front. Allied concerns over a separate peace between Germany and the Soviet Union were at their height in early 1943, a potential eventuality they hoped to mitigate at the Casablanca Conference. In January 1943, the Soviets had not yet won the battle of Stalingrad, Tunisia was still held by the Axis, and the Allies realised that there would be no cross-Channel invasion of France that year. At Casablanca, Roosevelt announced the policy of unconditional surrender, thereby, among other reasons, hoping to reassure the Soviets that the Allies were not looking to betray their eastern illiberal ally in favour of a compromise peace, and so to prevent Stalin from entertaining such ideas of negotiation himself. Nevertheless, only in 1944 after the invasion of France did the mutual worry of separate treaties fade.²⁰ The prospect of a premature peace by one's allies frightened policy-makers and strategists in Washington, in London, and in Moscow. The Western Allies, in particular, acted to mitigate Soviet worries.

Victory eventually came, together with peace. However, this peace was to prove initially disappointing for Western liberals. Rather than liberate the continent – since defending the integrity of Poland against a totalitarian invader and occupier was the West's initial motivation for war – the war resulted instead in merely delivering the eastern half of the continent into the occupation of another totalitarian dictatorship. One illiberal competitor was simply replaced by another one. A major geopolitical rivalry developed, or perhaps reemerged, between the liberal West and the Soviet Union. This was a result which was arguably over-determined by the geopolitics of the war itself.²¹ Moreover, after brief initial success, the superpower rivalry spread into many of the various international institutions set up after the Second World War, such as the United Nations, and so rendered them much less effective than originally desired. Not only had liberalism, especially in Europe, become even more circumscribed than before the Second World War, but the liberal belief that peace would lead to international harmony was not fulfilled.

An exemplary case of an offensive liberal war waged for humanitarian motives and geopolitical intentions is the 1999 Kosovo War, which was the final act in the violent break-up of Yugoslavia. The Dayton Accords which settled the Bosnian War spurred the Kosovars to outright rebellion after their previous attempt at nonviolent noncooperation with the Serbs failed to lead to consideration of their complaints at Dayton. By turning to violence,

the Kosovars hoped to trigger a disproportionate Serb reaction that would, in turn, cause the West to intervene, politically if not militarily. The Serbs did react disproportionately, and the West did then intervene, which in turn caused the Serbs to accelerate their ethnic cleansing of the Albanian majority. NATO failed to prevent this as its air power was insufficient to halt, much less destroy, the small Serb military and paramilitary units which were entering Kosovar villages and ejecting whomever they wished. NATO member states were largely unwilling to dedicate ground troops to stop the ethnic cleansing, even though prior to the war many had concluded that any subsequent peace would only be preserved through the presence of a NATO-led peacekeeping force. The Serbs eventually made peace and allowed NATO to police it, although the precise causes of their change of behaviour remain disputed. Thus, NATO had to keep a peace which did not directly serve any party's policy. Kosovo did not fully gain its secessionist goals, although in 2008 it declared independence to mixed reactions. Serbia retained, until 2008, nominal sovereignty over Kosovo, but no real power. NATO, which had committed itself to the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia as it then existed, was trapped between two irreconcilable political goals of maintaining that territorial integrity and providing the Kosovars with some degree of self-determination.²² Even now, the dispute is arguably only frozen, not solved. Moreover, the aftermath of the war was marked by a smaller-scale ethnic counter-cleansing of a significant portion of the Kosovo Serb population by the Albanians. However, under the aegis of the European Union's EULEX mission to Kosovo from 2008 onward, the nascent country has been slowly progressing toward at least some liberal democratic norms and may yet become a real success story for the spread of liberalism after intervention.

The peaces which follow offensive liberal wars of humanitarian motive and strategic intent are typically characterised by an immediate failure to address either the political roots of the war or to fulfil the policies of the liberal intervener. Because the liberal belligerent satisfies his honour by preventing (any more of a) humanitarian catastrophe, but sees the cost of actually solving the underlying political problem as exorbitant, he leaves it unaddressed. These wars, of all liberal wars, are the most discretionary and so tend to offend the least in allying to illiberal polities, in part because the West may have the opportunity indirectly to shape the emerging polities.

The Iraq War did not begin entirely as an offensive liberal war with geopolitical motivations and humanitarian intentions, but also as a counter proliferation effort. This latter aspect quickly dried up, leaving the geopolitical motives of defeating the insurgents and ensuring the survival of the newly installed democratic government, and the humanitarian intents of encouraging liberalism in the new democracy while also protecting the inhabitants of Iraq from increasing sectarian strife and terror. This was achieved sometimes through the application of population-centric COIN tactics and sometimes by taking the fight directly to the insurgents in intelligence-driven operations, particularly during the Surge.²³ After much self-deception, misspent effort and lost blood and treasure, the result was a breathing space for the Iraqi regime to try to stand up for itself. The United States withdrew its final military forces by the end of December 2011, leaving behind numerous thousands of civilians, diplomats, and contractors. Iraq remained somewhat unstable, with continued sectarian violence, and ISIS emerged as a force capable not just of standing up to, but even routing, government forces in 2014. In the wake of Iraq's military recovery, supported by the United States, ISIS turned to insurgency to continue

the fight, slowly losing major battles since 2015. Politically, the coalition of the anti-American Muqtada al-Sadr won the parliamentary elections of May 2018. Despite American support against ISIS, Iraq's future appears to lead away from Western liberalism as ties with Iran are strengthened instead, a result contrary to the West's ideological or geopolitical interests.

Offensive liberal wars characterised by strategic motive and humanitarian intent illustrate that any political actor has myriad other considerations besides simply the constitution of its government. Iraq was a regime change success but both ideologically and geopolitically the success and results of its democratisation has been far more mixed. In the short term, these wars seem always to produce policy failure; the investment of liberal mentorship in a wartime context is long and exhausting.

Conclusion

War is an inherently illiberal activity, and in liberal wars this illiberality is only increased by liberal strategies which presuppose illiberal allies in some sort of crucial role in both the war and the subsequent peace. The gravest defensive liberal wars, those waged for the very survival of liberal values, ironically require an illiberal ally to help bear great, if not the greatest, burdens and costs of fighting. That illiberal ally, through its efforts and despite facing a potentially expanded zone of liberal peace, then becomes the next greatest threat to liberal values, abetted in this role by the liberal belligerents.

Offensive liberal wars, by contrast, are explicitly waged to expand the zone of liberal peace. Those characterised by humanitarian motive and geopolitical intent are waged from the air, in support of indigenous, probably illiberal, allies on the ground. The West intervenes on a principled basis, but the peace which follows usually betrays those principles to some degree in favour of a settlement – sometimes, to be protected by peace-keepers. Offensive liberal wars characterised by geopolitical motives and humanitarian intent are those which deliberately attempt to nation-build in a wartime situation. These efforts have thus far consistently failed to create a functioning client state capable of maintaining its own security. The resultant polity typically fails to perform competently in war, to act as a client to the liberal intervener, or to behave liberally or democratically.

Liberal wars have consistently failed to do full justice to liberal values in delivering a suitable peace, the extreme exigencies of major defensive liberal wars notwithstanding. Peace after liberal war tends to preserve failures of policy, or of principle, much more than it codifies their successes, and frequently it benefits the illiberal ally, sometimes at the expense of the liberal belligerent. Yet such failures are not usually fatal in international relations. Instead, politics works and takes effect endlessly. Policy failure in any single instance does not necessarily lead to definitive and everlasting political failure, as peace is the continuation of politics at least as much as is war, and future outcomes are always contingent on present actions. Thus, for example, despite the result of the Second World War representing substantial policy failure, the post-Cold War world of liberal triumph was built upon this foundation of earlier failure – as well as upon all the politics between the end of the world war and the advent of the 1990s. Kosovo is another example of the initial peace as a failure of liberal values, but EULEX has now gradually nudged Kosovo in a liberal direction. Failures are never permanent. Nevertheless, the immediacy of the ideological aspect does push many other important

international relations factors into the background of decision-making, which may warp the political and strategic judgments of any liberal polity.

Notes

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