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War, politics and peacebuilding

Thoughts and practical guidelines derived from ancient times.

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The experts in ancient history and archaeology who are familiar with studies of peace and war can provide different ideas about building peace in the present day. They can do so, while situating themselves within current debates, on the basis of certain previous studies about war, violent conflict and the political management of humanitarian disasters and wars; the “collateral damage” of antiquity. The great advantage of modern analysis of the phenomenon of war, violence and especially peace on the basis of paradigms and data from the ancient world lies in the possibility of grasping, intellectually, the complete historical cycle which leads to a given peace process. This policy paper offers an analysis of military conflicts in such a way as to cover the entire sequence of events and aims to present some ideas which may improve conceptual tools and research programs, and in the future, may contribute to better practical proposals for peacebuilding.

Context

War, politics and peacebuilding

The experience of the last two decades shows that the modern academic study of peace processes has usually been limited to fields such as sociology, international relations, political science, contemporary history or the philosophy of peace, in the latter case reaching the point of encouraging the growth of a so-called ‘culture of peace’. However, this does not exclude the possibility that other related disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities can give rise to intellectual reflections which may, in turn, complement the theoretical framework of peace studies and even provide practical guidelines to those responsible for managing peace processes on the ground.

Specifically, from the field of ancient history and archaeology we believe we can provide some alternative ideas in this line, above all on the basis of certain previous studies of war, conflict and the political management of disasters, or “collateral damage” in ancient times. In this case, we take the

historical and geopolitical framework of Greco-Roman antiquity, understood clearly in the Mediterranean context, and to which it is necessary to add the protohistoric societies, those which were described with a certain moral superiority in the classical cultures, which defined them as part of their “other”. In fact, one of the great advantages of a modern analysis of the phenomenon of war, violence and especially peace, on the basis of ancient paradigms lies precisely in the possibility of grasping, intellectually, the complete historical cycle which leads to a given peace process.

Thus, despite the difficulty of dealing with the limited evidence that remains of historic societies which are indeed remote in time, it is possible to present an analysis of military conflicts in such a way as to cover the entire sequence of events: 1) the origins of the military conflict; 2) the war itself; and 3) the post-conflict period and any peace processes, together with their consequences both in the short and the long term, including those cases in which the “post-conflict period” was in reality merely the prologue to another war.

For several years Dr Vicente Martínez Guzmán, a specialist in the study of the culture of peace, has argued the need to bring about an ‘epistemological shift’, so as to centre intellectual interest on peace, and not so much on wars and conflicts, when the different disciplines analyse these issues:

“I’m changing the epistemological paradigm by which we used to study peace. It used to seem that we could only talk about peace – or in the case of my present argument, solidarity – in terms of the absence of violence. I am proposing a change in the way we understand it: it’s violence that’s negative, that which destroys the different firm connections between different human communities, between their members and between the communities as such. It is violence that destroys solidarity and the multiple ways of making peace” (Martínez Guzmán 2000: 86-87).

However, it is largely disappointing, from a moral point of view, to have to recognise that in issues such as the management of armed conflicts and peacebuilding, the historical evidence from the ancient world makes it difficult for the classical historian or the archaeologist to carry out the ‘epistemological shift’ that Dr Martínez Guzmán calls for.

In fact, when analysing conflicts in ancient societies, the main feature that one would emphasise is the inherently warlike nature of these societies. War and a whole range of other forms of violence, whether organised or not (from the ritualised violence of war to banditry or piracy), are the key elements that define in a strict sense the worldview of these peoples, beyond the question of whether or not they possess state structures of a certain complexity.

In some cases one can note the presence of a genuine ‘endemic violence’ or a state of ‘permanent war’, which can in turn be defined as ‘systemic’, that is to say necessary for a certain development of human societies at a given point in their history. We find a good example in the Roman Republic which, from the fifth century BC onwards, found itself impelled on a program of continual territorial expansion through the Italian peninsula and, from the middle of the third century BC, throughout the Mediterranean, even competing for hegemony at an international level with other powers, such as Carthage or some Greek kingdoms. Overall, this territorial expansion was encouraged at a political level by oligarchic elites interested in pushing a militaristic culture through which they could establish their social, political and also economic domain. However, the militarisation of society in Republican Rome extended itself ‘from above’ to the rest of the social body. If at first citizens’ participation in the army was restricted to those who had a certain level of registered income, the gradual extension of military conflicts led to an growth in recruitment from disadvantaged social groups, who also ended up obtaining increased benefits from their regular participation in war, thanks to a greater role in

the distribution of the booty and the ongoing professionalisation of what had formerly been an army based on citizens’ military service.

However, over the last decade interpretations have emerged which question not so much the supposed ‘aggressiveness’ of this Republican expansion, as the fact of having excessively focused our attention on Rome as an ‘aggressive power’, while underestimating a Mediterranean environment which was equally ‘aggressive’, with the different powers in constant battles for hegemony, and in direct competition with each other (Eckstein 2006). In any case, the growing militarisation of society in the Roman Republic, in the context of what seemed to be a ‘war without end’ destabilised the Republican political system itself, ultimately leading to its collapse and to the victory of an absolute power, that of the last of the Republican dynasts, Octavian, the future Augustus.

This case illustrates in an exemplary manner that the modern understanding of the pacification that was consolidated during the Augustan Principate is only possible thanks a historical perspective

The latter – in his political testament, known as *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, inscribed on the walls of his Mausoleum and preserved thanks to copies of the text found on monuments in Asia Minor – also solemnly declared that the new regime was based on peace. To demonstrate this, chapter 2 of his testament states that during his Principate, the Senate ordered the closing of the doors of the temple of Janus – thus marking, as the tradition dictated, a victory leading to peace – on three occasions; they had only been closed twice in the whole of Roman history (RGDA, 2.13). The new *pax augusta* in fact represents a ‘pacification’ with peace understood as the central element of the *concordia ordinum* (‘concord’ between the social orders, but once again ‘ordered’ from above) and, in turn, as the opposite of war – in this case symbolised by the ancient civil wars within the Republic – but henceforth at the service of a policy of hegemonic control on the part of the *princeps inter pares*, understood as ‘first among equals’ (Syme 1989 [1939]).

This case illustrates in an exemplary way that the modern understanding of the ‘pacification’ which was consolidated under the Augustan Principate (31 BC - 14

AD) is only possible thanks, in part, to the historical perspective that we obtain from a complete analysis of the conflict itself, especially during the later Civil Wars (44-31 BC), and finally of the origins of the conflict during the last century of the Republic (133-44 BC). We believe that precisely such a complete sequence of events is one of the main contributions of the study of antiquity to the analysis of peace processes and to the development of useful models for debate at a comparative level. Thus, war and politics remain so centrally tied in to the worldview of most ancient societies that, as has already been mentioned, the practical application of the 'epistemological shift' proposed by Dr Martínez Guzmán becomes extraordinarily difficult, especially taking into account certain historical evidence which seem to marginalise peace if this is not directly related to the other two categories of analysis mentioned above: war and politics.

Analysis

War, politics and peace in classical Greece

We have no record of any kind of peace process in classical ancient Greece. In fact, agreements were of a very temporary nature and they should only be seen as truces rather than 'peace agreements' as such. In fact, the first and only multilateral peace in the turbulent history of ancient Greece is that known as the 'King's Peace' or the 'peace of Antalcidas', sworn by the great powers of Greece and the Great King of Persia, Artaxerxes II, in 386 BC. For this reason this treaty is particularly interesting from a historical point of view. Given that this 'peace' has generated many fierce debates which, for now, seem unsolvable, we will not address these issues here, focussing instead on some theoretical aspects that appear to us to be especially interesting.

In the first place, it must be noted that the 'King's peace' did not end two different wars, but only one. This war — the Spartan-Persian War (399-386 BC) — had, furthermore, a strongly imperialist character. Thus, in 395 BC, those Greek powers that had most to lose should Sparta become what we now call an imperialist 'superpower' — namely Athens, Thebes, Corinth and Argos — came together and, allying themselves with Artaxerxes II, formally declared war on the Lacedaemonians, which is how the Spartans are also known (Alonso Troncoso 1997: 63). Thus began the misnamed Corinthian War (Gomez-Castro 2012: 157 ff). While Lacedaemon (Sparta) won two land victories against their allied enemies (at Nemea and Coronea), these did not provide any real strategic advantage in the war and served only for propaganda purposes (Fornis 2003). In addition, in August 394 BC, the Persian fleet had captured the whole Spartan fleet off the coast of Cnidus, which meant *de facto* the end of Lacedaemonian imperialism in the Aegean. Especially so, given that the following year, the Persian fleet took

over the island of Kythira and turned it into their base for maritime military operations (X. *HG* 4.8.8). The close proximity of this island to the Peloponnesian peninsula put the Lacedaemonian authorities on the alert, since from there it would be easy to promote a Helot revolt in Messenia (Hdt. 7,235, Th 4.53-54), which would undoubtedly have finished off the Lacedaemonian state.

Faced with the prospect of losing everything, in 392 BC Sparta requested an audience with the Great King of Persia to negotiate 'peace' (Fornis 2005). If in ancient Greece there was anything like a 'preemptive peace', this deal can only be understood in these terms. During the peace negotiations at Sardis, the Lacedaemonians offered the Persian King everything they thought would help end the war (X. *HG* 4.14.1; And. 3.12-13), but Artaxerxes deeply hated the Spartans, whom he considered the most false amongst men (Plu. *Art* 22), and therefore he ignored the calls for peace. The war would continue for six more years, but with substantial differences compared to the first three years of conflict. In this second phase, the war was mainly focused on the conflict between Athens and Sparta (Alonso Troncoso 1999), thus reproducing the Manichaean model of the Peloponnesian War. Athens, then led by Thrasybulus of Steiria, began the preparations required to rebuild the Athenian empire in the Aegean (*IG* II2 24, X. *HG* 4.8.25-31; D. 20.59). This further legitimised Antalcidas, who this time succeeded in selling the idea that Sparta had been the only force capable of stopping Athenian imperialism. Thus if, as the Great King wished, the Lacedaemonians were completely defeated, no one would be able to stop Athens. Then Artaxerxes would once again see Asia Minor attacked by a Greece united under the hegemony of Attica. For this reason, in 386 BC the Great King accepted the peace proposal that he had rejected contemptuously just six years before, and in doing so he established himself as the arbiter of Greek affairs (X. *HG* 5.1.31).

In this sense, it seems clear that both the failed proposal of 392 BC and the peace agreement of 386 BC can only be understood as weapons of war. In fact it would not be an exaggeration to say that Spartan diplomacy, aware that it would lose the war, was sufficiently capable so as to win the peace (Seager 1974: 36). This is the conception of peace in ancient Greece that we have to keep in mind. Peace had no legal value *per se*, and therefore did not even have any associated rules. Military conflict, in contrast, was subject to well-defined rules, although these were customary, fruit of the military rituals of the *agon* (conflict). These laid down the rights and obligations of both the aggressors and the attacked, as well as their respective allies, establishing even the type of compensation to be paid in the case of the invasion of territory (a *casus belli* par excellence in the Greek world), and the types of alliances between powers, such as the *symmachia* (an offensive and defensive alliance) and the *epimachia* (a solely defensive alliance). In this regard, it is interesting to note that the *agon* allowed both a power

and its defensive allies to invade the territory of a third party as compensation for a previous violation of its territorial integrity (Alonso Troncoso 2007: 209 ff). That is to say, in Ancient Greece the international rules for a solely defensive alliance also provided for actions which were, *de facto*, 'offensive', but which according to the 'international law' recognised by all parties involved (and not because these rules were customary were they any less the 'law') were categorised as 'defensive'.

This shows us an important development of the international law applicable to a conflict in progress, but it gives a very poor impression of the concept of peace in ancient Greece. Peace was merely a temporary agreement or truce (Alonso Troncoso 2007), something imposed by the strong on the weak (Albini 1964: 71; Missiuo 1992: 63) or, as we have seen in the case of the King's peace, merely a weapon of war. In Greece, war was a structural element of the economic and socio-political system of the state. Permanent peace would have meant the end of the very system of the polis, having exactly the same effect as imperialism could have had. For the Greeks, then, war represented a middle ground between the two extremes of peace and imperialism. The latter, as is well known, embodies in programmatic terms a very specific idea of 'peace'.

The post-conflict

The causes that bring a conflict to an end (or sometimes merely bring the end of one chapter of the conflict) can be diverse: complete victory over the enemy, or alternatively total defeat; partial achievement of the objectives; the exhaustion of the forces... And then, when the war ends, peace comes into being. Peace is thus the framework in which the post-conflict events take place. As we have already indicated, in ancient times peace was not understood in the same way as we conceive it today: it is now accepted as a value which must form part of humanity's cultural heritage, as a necessary condition for the full development of human communities; as a 'universalist' and perpetual political project, in terms of Kant's conception.

As a result of the role given to war by ancient societies — and as we have seen, it was an intrinsic part of their worldview— peace meant, in general, the absence of war, or else it simply described a neutral state. That is to say, it would be one type of relationship between different groups of people, but achieving such a situation would not in itself be a goal. Peace is reached usually by being imposed following a war, when the winner lays down the terms of the victory; it may also be product of an agreement, but in such agreements there will always be a dominant party which dictates its terms and controls the process. In fact, this insight leads us to see that the political strategies for peace are

no more than unilaterally exercised forms of power, simply expressed in a different way and with a greater or lesser degree of latent aggression (coercion, threats, orders; or else reconciliation, forgiveness, leniency), depending on the circumstances and requirements. The famous *Pax Romana*, advocated by Augustus, must be understood in this sense. As mentioned above, we must not see this as a search or a demand for peace in the modern sense of the term, but as a method of rule designed to maintain this state of affairs over the long term.

Peace strategies thus do not appear as a uniform or homogenous model to be applied in a standard way, based on a given set of principles, but are 'customised', designed *ad hoc* for each case.

So peace strategies thus do not appear as a uniform or homogenous model to be applied in a standard way, based on a given set of general principles, but are designed *ad hoc* for each case, 'customised' depending on the return or gains that are being sought (symbolic, ideological-propagandistic, economic...) or the dynamic that the conflict itself has imposed. Moreover, it can also often be seen that the way in which peace is handled inevitably gives birth to later conflicts. Although the Von Clausewitz's maxim, that *war is the continuation of politics by other means*, certainly applies to the ancient world, several examples from Greek and Roman antiquity lead us to ask whether *politics* (and consequently, *peace*, as a period of non-war) *would not be the natural continuation of war by other means*, especially in a society which has military conflict deeply rooted in its world view. Thus, to understand a peace process, it is necessary to consider beforehand, and as an integral part of the analysis, the specific case in hand and the development of the military conflicts that preceded it (Gomez *et al* 2012, forthcoming).

For the Assyrians of the second millennium BC, the extermination of enemies was, in itself, a genuine 'peace policy'. In fact, in antiquity, the treatment of defeated enemies is reflected perfectly by the famous expression *Vae Victis!* (Woe to the vanquished!), as a threat; they should expect the worst case scenario of a lack of guarantees or respect. We can not speak of the existence of forms of regulation through international

humanitarian law, expressing even a desire to minimise the effects of war on combatants and civilians, such as with the Geneva Conventions. Such law is simply nonexistent in the ancient world, and even the very concept of moral respect for human life, of respect for the individual, tacitly assumed, loses all value from the moment in which the individual comes to acquire the status of 'subject'. The idea of the human being as an equal disappears, along with the independent socio-political organisation to which he or she belonged, and whose existence guaranteed such supposed rights. The destruction of this organisation transforms the individual into a being without status or condition. The defeated are therefore at the mercy and discretion of the victor, who can consequently subject them to extermination, enslavement, deportation and forcible transfer, without any moral qualms, as well as dispose of their assets and settle new occupants on their lands and exploit them. They can also decide to maintain them physically, while depriving them of sovereignty, assimilating them, or permitting some independence under the obligation to meet certain requirements which simultaneously function as a (humiliating) reminder of their submission, as compensation, and as the economic exploitation of their resources. Thus, these requirements may take the form of participation in future conflicts as an ally, through contributing troops; maintaining and providing for the army; or paying taxes, in cash or in kind, depending on the nature of the territory taken.

Peace policies may also reveal a clear objective of cultural manipulation. In ancient times, the establishment of hegemony generally led to the imposition of the culture of the victor, and also to the destruction of the cultural identity of the defeated side, or else the selective preservation of certain elements of this identity in the interests of the victor, all of which determine and condition the historical memory of the conflict. In this sense, the so-called process of Romanisation would be a paradigm case, with the deployment of a set of policies by Rome aimed at the consolidation of its power in the conquered territories, but at the same time drawing people to the hegemonic Roman culture: from the development of urban life as the model for civilisation to the use of particular types of tableware when eating, and of course adopting the language of power.

Recommendations

The overall impression of war and peace in ancient times, of its meaning and its management is, to today's eyes, both terribly negative and depressing. One might even conclude that there is no point in analysing this history and that it offers nothing of interest for the present day viewpoints or needs of humanity. The experiences of antiquity cannot become a model to be applied in the contemporary world, for obvious reasons. However, discounting them would also be a mistake, because the lessons of the past, even of the distant past, may help us to understand the present,

and in this context studying them does make sense. The concept of peace in the present time is the antithesis of that of the ancient world, precisely because society has gradually taken on the idea of peace as a value, as a universal and shared objective of respect and coexistence. Society has come to accept that to prevent war it is necessary to transform peace into a necessity, but also into a political instrument. It is precisely in this political game where some of our reflections are relevant. In particular, in the overriding importance of international relations and especially of arbitration in disputes between states. Thus, one of the biggest differences between that distant past and our present lies in the role that supranational entities can play today, although *realpolitik* does not always help them in this task.

Thus, as we have seen in the case of classical Greece, in ancient times those who played the role of arbiter of peace on the international arena generally also aspired for political hegemony in a particular region, logically through war.

Thus, peace was usually subject to immediate political interests and, in this context, war was conceived of as an inevitable element of political progress. Even so, today we have institutions which, at least in theory, limit any hypothetical scenario of hegemony and/or confrontation.

Thus, it should be possible to set limits to international violence by strengthening the factor of supranational arbitration, provided this is stripped of all partisan interests. Similarly, if in the ancient world there was a widely accepted 'culture of war', closely linked to violence as a *modus vivendi*, in our day it is without doubt necessary to promote a 'culture of peace' as an integral element of politics, economics and public education.

The truth is that history, however remote it may be, allows us to observe certain behaviour of human beings in society and, above all, learn from this.

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EDITORS' NOTE:

This policy paper is quite different from previous papers, even though in general terms it follows the usual format. The reason is that we asked the people responsible for two ICIP research projects, who have been working for a long time on issues related to war and peace building in the ancient world, to reflect on their field of study in the light of the present day. To do so, over the last two years they ventured into the complex field of studies on peace, security and war in our world, they presented a joint seminar with the ICIP on war in the ancient and the modern world, and finally, here they offer us an initial document which helps us to think about how to establish synergies between research programs, research groups, and especially to help recover the original spirit of peace research in the 1950s: making a hybrid between scientific fields through a combined commitment to the rules of academic knowledge and the desire to reduce and eliminate the consequences of armed conflict.

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