

For better or worse, wars remain with us

By VALENTINE ANTHONY

WE REMEMBER and regret past wars but we repeat them well. Hence, the four-letter word "wars" haunts us.

Nuclear deterrence was part of the Cold War deal between the United States and the former Soviet Union. There was euphoria when the USSR disintegrated into Russia and 15 other republics in 1991. But conflicts raged in Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Palestine, Kashmir, Korea and Afghanistan, to name a few.

These are now overshadowed by "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in defiance of the United Nations and worldwide anti-war protests.

Wars do not happen in a vacuum. They take place in the context of the present 193 sovereign states in the international system. Their constant interaction for peace and security significantly affects the conduct of international relations. For example, if each state has five types of national interest, there will be 965 different issues to be resolved peacefully among themselves, falling which wars erupt like volcanoes among nations.

Although the threat or use of force is a recognised instrument of international politics, sovereign states normally try to influence, bargain, negotiate and compromise diplomatically to settle their

differences amicably.

The late Oxford don Hedley Bull in his 1977 book *The Anarchical Society* defines war as "organised violence carried on by political units against each other" and "a settled pattern of behaviour shaped towards the promotion of common goals".

Interpreted correctly, war is any kind of armed conflict between states to defend or secure certain national goals from citizens, territory, security, ideology, resources, weapons, terrorism and separatism. In short, conflicts occur when a nation's objectives undermine the national interests of a rival or unfriendly state.

Research shows that there were 275 wars between 1480-1941. There were 210 and 617 serious conflicts in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively. Less than 10 per cent or 63 of them led to wars and great powers accounted for 41 per cent of all conflicts either as parties or initiators.

Since 1945, nearly 70 wars were fought among UN members in violation of the UN Charter. The higher incidence of conflicts is attributed to the increased number of states — from 23 in the 1820s, to 165 in 1990s and 193 in 2003.

Wars are not just facts and figures. The intangibles too must be taken into account. Miscalculations, wrong perceptions, anticipation and

prestige, all led to two disastrous world wars.

In 1914, when Serbian student Princip assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Arch Duke Ferdinand, in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, all potential parties assumed that the isolated murder would remain localised, and war, if any, would be short. Further, Germany, one of the principals, presumed that its rivals Britain, France and Russia would remain neutral. The result was WWI (1914-1917).

Similarly, prior to WWII

(1939-1945), Britain and France underestimated Germany's military and economic power. The Maginot Line did not stop the German blitzkrieg into France through neutral Belgium.

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's "appeasement" and "peace at all costs" were self-deceptive. While the Anglo-French misread Hitler, the latter with his V-2 rockets, equally misjudged their will to fight until victory in Berlin in 1945.

Thus, when WWI broke loose, wartime British Prime

Minister Winston Churchill vowed, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat" while Hitler claimed, "The fight which begins today will determine Germany's destiny for a thousand years".

In Asia, Imperial Japan had a free hand in the "China Incident". On the pretext of freeing Asia from European colonialism, Japan struck at Pearl Harbour on Dec 8, 1941 to grab prized commodities in the region despite its inherent fear of American military superiority.

Washington suspected Im-

perial Japan and yet it was caught with its pants down by Tora Tora. A day later, President Roosevelt declared war against Japan for its "unprovoked and dastardly" attack on the US and joined the Anglo-French against Germany.

It is conceivable that a weaker state like Japan would rationally "go to war" against the stronger US even if it was bound to lose because one values war as a goal to secure or defend its self-interpreted national interests. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's gamble in Kuwait in 1991 is a good example.

Ironically, nuclear-armed long-range military aircrafts, rockets and missiles are considered deterrent but not the so-called chemical weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In 1998, India and Pakistan joined the nuclear family; the US, Russia, China, Britain and France. The US has 10,000 nuclear warheads, Israel 400, North Korea one and Iraq none, while nuclear suspect South Africa was disarmed promptly by the UN. Iran and Libya remain as suspects.

Irrespective of deterrence and ownership, in practical terms, nuclear and chemical weapons are WMD. Their mode of production and delivery system vary but their end is the same — deaths, as in atomic-bombed Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945, the

64 million litres of Agent Orange in Vietnam and Saddam's 5,000 Kurds gassed in Halabja in Iraq.

Notwithstanding nuclear weapons and WMD, wars have occurred from time immemorial. In recent memory, they include the Arab-Israeli conflict, Indo-Pakistan, Korean, Vietnam, Falklands, Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq, the first Gulf War and Gulf War II in Iraq.

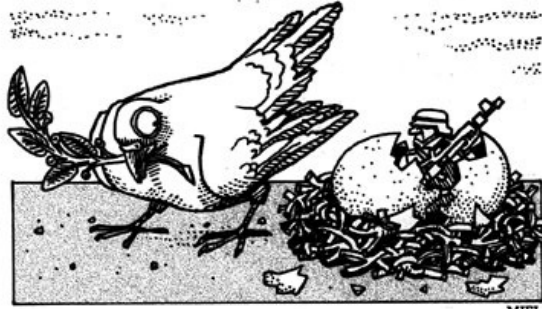
The question is not right or wrong, ethical or legal. It is the inevitability of wars. Regrettably, history is a graveyard of wars.

Wars, just or unjust, for better or worse, will remain with us as long as values and goals of people, political leaders and nations remain insatiable and irreconcilable. Herein lies war and peace, but is it war before peace or peace before war? Whichever, they are abbreviated by nations, place and time.

The great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy in his *War and Peace* in 1869 says: "All peace is not good and all wars are not bad." If one wishes, one can reverse it to "All peace is not bad and all wars are not good".

The choice is ours; if not, it is Tolstoy's.

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NOTE: Paragraph 14 should read as:
Thus, WWII. Regret for the error.