

Understand Our Enemies, Invite Peace

Goldwin Emerson, gandjemerson@rogers.com

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Let me begin by commending *The London Free Press* for its recent coverage of photos and stories related to the First World War, WWI, that began approximately 100 years ago. The *London Free Press* has described the Canadian commitment of our government, our people, and most of all, the courage and bravery of our Canadian soldiers. It has made the task of teachers, and grandparents and parents easier by explaining the facts of WWI to our fellow Canadians who are still younger than seniors.

War and peace bring ethical issues to the foreground. War by its very nature is designed to destroy lives, property, and peaceful interaction among humans. War results in the breakdown of society. Peacemakers, on the other hand, in the long run, come to be known as the heroes in history because they stand for cooperation among nations. Peacemakers are the constructive builders of society. They make progress among civilizations. Peacemakers uphold ethical values in society and make it possible for humankind to develop in ethical directions.

War is not inevitable, but neither is peace. Nations make great sacrifices whether they choose the path of peace or of war.

The motives and commitment of either our war-like enemies or our peace-loving allies are never fully known to us until after the fact. In the Second World War, WWII, Canadians were never quite sure of the motives of our Russian allies. In Vietnam, the USA efforts to win a prolonged war ended in an eventual withdrawal by USA. In Afghanistan, a number of European armies, one after the other, left Afghanistan without accomplishing victory in any lasting or meaningful sense. Over one-hundred years prior to WWI, the Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, wrote in his epic tome, *War and Peace*, "We can know only that we know nothing. And that is the highest degree of human wisdom." He realized then that countries do

not engage in war unless they believe they can be victorious. But the belief is just that, a “belief”, and not a known fact. It is usually when it becomes clear to one of the combatants that their chances of victory are very unlikely, that thoughts of peace become more attractive than war.

There are those who argue that throughout history, wars have been one of the main ways of settling disputes. Therefore, they conclude that wars are likely to be with us for a long time in the future.

I do not subscribe to this view which is often given as a support for future wars. Today’s wartime technology enables immense destruction, and huge costs which far surpass that of centuries ago. It is now possible to destroy countries, and kill thousands of people, including non-combatants, in very short order.

But in the long run, ordinary citizens desire peace and prosperity and mutual respect. A peace from the participants comes from agreements that are mutually beneficial to both sides of the conflict. After war comes to an end, it will still be necessary to arrive at peaceful agreements if peace is to last. Even then, as Albert Einstein said, “Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding”.

Having mentioned the costs of war and the benefits of peace I recognize that just as it takes two opposite sides to make war, it also takes two opposite sides to desire peace. Both sides need to be willing to work hard to make that event happen successfully. In this sense, WWI may have been inevitable. That is, Canada and its allies wanted peace, but there did not seem to be a willingness from our opponents to make peace just prior to WWI.

Given this unfortunate situation, I am proud of Canada, its government, its people, and its armed forces. Our soldiers served their country with distinction and courage and bravery. I am pleased that the *London Free Press* has reminded us of their sacrifices and their commitment. I think it can truthfully be said that their actions in WWI helped Canada form a strong national identity and develop into a wonderful place to live.