

Suicide Bombers versus Sexual Abusers: A Battle of Depravity or Western Fixations?

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Abstract

In this paper, originally presented as a talk to ‘*The Barbarisation of Warfare*’ conference, held at the University of Wolverhampton on 27-28 June 2005, I indicate that if warfare is perceived as barbaric today – possibly more so than in the past – then this has more to do with our subjective confusion as to the purpose and direction of contemporary society, as well as the conflicts produced by it, than by any objective index of barbarism.

Whilst all sides in recent conflicts appear to have behaved in a degenerate or degrading manner to one another, it is worth noting that much of this perception stems from a Western inability to comprehend suicide as sacrifice, due to the demise of purpose and commitment, as well as a refusal to confront the corrosion and corruption of Western culture, and in particular the confusion and conflation of the public-private divide, driven from the top-down.

Unfortunately, a well-meaning but moralistic focus on acts of barbarism has encouraged a less than critical mindset to develop, which seeks affirmation in particular events, irrespective of evidence. This approach also fails to build a robust and effective political challenge to those who have argued for Western intervention in the affairs of other states. Indeed, these two outlooks can often exist side-by-side, thereby revealing their inner bankruptcy.

Barbarism – Objective and Subjective

In any objective sense of the word, war is always barbaric. The aim – to subject ones adversaries to the will of the victor – and the method – violence, up to and including physical annihilation – are hardly emblematic of civilisation at its finest.

However, it is difficult to compare the suffering and loss endured by people across different historical periods. It could be argued that, compared to certain episodes in the past, warfare today has become less barbarous. New technologies, whilst enabling the projection of action at a distance on an unprecedented scale, are also held to afford the possibility of a more targeted, or clinical, exercising of power. Certainly, contemporary conflicts are more open to the scrutiny of outsiders, and are more regulated by insiders, than those of previous epochs (1).

Opponents of such views point to the somewhat casual sense in which the modern military refer to collateral damage. They seek to expose the reality behind the myth of satellite-aided, laser-guided precision bombing. And whilst conventions and law do impact upon defence personnel in an unprecedented way today, there are few grounds for assuming that these would necessarily hold sway in anything other than the relatively localised and limited conflicts that have emerged in the post-Cold War world order.

In addition to this, there is a clear and distinct sense in which contemporary warfare is perceived as being more barbaric by a wider section of the population than in the past. This is not merely driven by the modern media allowing more people to be informed more rapidly as to what is going on. Rather, whilst war is objectively barbaric, our subjective sense of how barbaric it is, is inevitably mediated and interpreted through the prism of our understanding as to the purpose and meaning of particular conflicts or events.

When aims and objectives are clear, societies permit and tolerate the most remarkable acts of barbarism with little by way of evident doubt or regret. Dropping atomic weapons on Japanese civilian populations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki must rank as one of the most barbaric acts of war of all time. So too, do the various aerial bombardments of urban centres perpetrated by all sides during the Second World War.

Yet, these acts were tolerated by political leaders and their citizens at the time. Indeed, they rarely warranted much public discussion until more recently. The Japanese, in particular, had been dehumanised through their depiction as insects in war-time propaganda (2). Rightly or wrongly, there was a much greater sense of clarity and support as to the purpose of bombing them than more recently pertained in Iraq.

The Holocaust survivor, psychiatrist and writer, Viktor Frankl, has suggested that;

'Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning.' (3)

In other words, the key to understanding our perception of how barbaric a particular act or episode may be, relies in large part upon our ability to frame this – or not – within an appropriate cultural context and imbue it with meaning. This situates events socially, and helps act as an explanation to ourselves as to why we do what we do.

Contemporary Confusion

Of course, different social groups seek to appropriate and manipulate such meanings and interpretations to suit their own causes and their own sense of purpose. This internal, political conflict forms part of the battleground just as much as the physical encounter beyond, as politicians and military leaders have to explain themselves to their own populations. The military theorist Karl von Clausewitz understood this necessary element of winning hearts and minds amongst ones own, describing it as part of the *'friction'* of war (4), that precluded naïve idealism as to how warfare was truly conducted.

Notably however, the contemporary period is marked by a growing absence of principle or clarity in political debate, and a concomitant diminishing of levels of participation or commitment in political life (5). It should be no surprise therefore, that there is also a growing degree of confusion as to the purpose of contemporary conflicts and hence, a growing sense of their being more barbaric than necessary.

If ever any conflicts were ripe for the accusation of barbarism, then the ill-defined but on-going War on Terror since 2001, along with the Iraq War of 2003 and the occupation that ensues, fit the bill perfectly. This is because neither is perceived as having clearly determined aims or objectives. Indeed, in the case of the former, there is not even a defined enemy, whilst in relation to the latter, civilian populations have been presented with various objectives at different times (6).

These have included;

- the destruction of weapons of mass destruction,
- the elimination of the means to produce weapons of mass destruction,
- the preclusion of the ability to commit atrocities against various minorities,
- the liberation of women,
- the removal of Saddam Hussein,
- the achievement of regime change,
- the establishment of democracy in the region.

The last of these might be considered particularly remarkable in view of the increasingly poor electoral turn-out at various elections across the developed world in recent years. Even when there is a relatively minor rise in interest and participation, as was the case in the UK general election of 2005 and the US Presidential election of 2004, often this is largely out of a sense of duty rather than from having been inspired by any bold or ambitious vision of the future. Many vote negatively and voting rates amongst younger age-groups are now at a historical low (7).

Depravities or Fixations?

The title of this paper suggests that it might be possible to consider both sides in recent conflicts as having become somewhat degenerate. There is certainly an element of truth to this. The ritual humiliation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and elsewhere vies with the ritual decapitation of Western hostages in Iraq in an apparent battle of depravity.

However, it is worth noting that the latter, often released to the world media in the form of CAM-corder footage or displayed over the Internet, is also clearly designed to feed-off a presumed squeamishness for graphic and barbaric imagery amongst Westerners. These are known to have had considerable misgivings as to the purpose of recent conflicts in the first place, and it is this uncertainty that the insurgents seek to capitalise upon (8).

Terrorists in these, and various other situations, have shown themselves to have an acute, and astute, assessment of contemporary Western weaknesses and fixations. The Americans dress up their prisoners at Guantanamo Bay in orange jump-suits – the insurgents reciprocate with their hostages. Western politicians have become fixated with opinion polls and surveys – Osama bin Laden suggests in his messages that he is more than familiar with the outcomes of these, pointing to the fact that these show a lack of support for intervention in Iraq (9).

In one notable incident, after bombs had been detonated on a number of commuter trains in Madrid on the 11th of March 2003, a tape found subsequently in a waste-bin adjacent to a nearby Mosque was reported as carrying the message; ‘You love life, we love death’ (10). This is a caricature of Western fears and fixations about the Oriental other. Such sentiments had effectively been communicated by many in the Western media well before those attacks, and it was now being reflected and amplified.

Indeed, the ability of so many purported terrorists to so effectively appreciate our weaknesses and get under our skins, suggests that they may have more in common with the Westerners amongst whom they reside and where they were educated, than with those elements in the Middle East they are held to represent (11).

Regardless of this, since the events of the 11th of September 2001, Western commentators and security analysts have sought, as best they could, to get themselves into the mind of the terrorist (12). This considerable research effort into understanding the psychology and culture of terrorists has led many to read the Koran and other Islamic texts. The aim is to preclude similar events from happening again through obtaining an insight into the presumed enemy, as well as being able to explain that such attacks are against the teachings of Islam.

They need not have gone to such lengths. For when the elephant that is Western society is so paralysed by the flea that is Al Qaeda, then surely it is time we started to study the problems of the elephant rather than putting these all down to the strength of the flea. Most analysts seem to have become fixated with the flea, seeking to understand its size and motivation. They have thereby revealed their own weaknesses and obsessions.

New Terrorism?

The form that terrorism takes in any age has a tendency to reflect the values and main modes of expression of the dominant culture. Surprisingly maybe, terrorists usually want some of what is valued by the rest of society. Thus, for much of the twentieth century, when the major powers sought to uphold the sovereign rights of independent nation states, most terrorist groups engaged in national liberation struggles.

Nowadays however, in an age when the model of national sovereignty has been severely eroded through the doctrine of pre-emptive action and Western powers engage in supposedly ethical conflicts across the globe, it is unsurprising to discover a form of terrorism that is also global in its reach and ambitions (13). Above all, as Western aims and objectives are far from clear, we also find terrorists who do not declare their aims or admit responsibility for the acts they commit.

Profiles of many of those responsible for the 9/11 attacks, as with those connected to more recent events in Madrid and London, show that many spent considerable periods of time in the West, even being educated in Western universities (14). This should not be that surprising as, to a considerable extent the roots of anti-Western ideology are almost entirely Western in their origins.

One need not have awaited the publication of Michael Moore's infamous '*Stupid White Men*' (15), to contemplate the depth of cultural self-loathing that exists at the heart of our own societies. Numerous scholars, teaching to packed lecture theatres in Oxford, Cambridge, Ivy League Colleges and other prestigious establishments are quite adept at highlighting the depths of what they consider to be Western decadence and corruption.

Certainly, if one considers the substance of these recent attacks, rather than merely their form, or who they were manifested by, the picture is clear. One does not need to travel to the Middle East to find articulate expressions of anti-American, anti-Western, anti-scientific and anti-progressive ideas. In some measure, the so-called anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements had been presenting these for quite some time. The destruction of the World Trade Centre somewhat took the wind out of their sails.

Indeed, the depth of anti-human sentiment evident in contemporary society is quite striking. From the green movement through animal rights protestors to other contemporary anti-affluence groups, if '*the key to the ideology of violence is to see your enemy as sub-human*' (16), as is sometimes suggested, then we appear to be doing quite a good job at demonising ourselves without the need for outsiders to do so for us.

There is no need to search for the roots of such ideology in Islam. Indeed, some of those arrested more recently have been suggested as indicating that they held no religious purpose (17). They just wanted to teach the West a lesson. But that is a lesson they may well have learnt here, in the West. Notably, the curriculum in our schools has increasingly taken on a moral bent along such lines. From History lessons through Geography to Science and even English, the main theme often appears to be to reflect upon the dangerous nature of humanity as a whole.

Fixations with Suicide

Contemporary Western society has developed an ambiguous attitude towards suicide. On the one hand, we are unable to fathom the mindset of those willing to sacrifice themselves in pursuit of their largely undisclosed goals. On the other, the judiciary are now regularly confronted with requests to allow individuals with presumed terminal conditions to end their lives (18).

This confusion reflects both the inability to contemplate a greater purpose beyond oneself and the low value attached to life itself in the world today. It is often suggested that the very fact that someone is prepared to commit suicide means we are now dealing with mindless fanatics. Their goals are presented as non-negotiable and their tactics are perceived as abhorrent aberrations (19).

It is ironic then that such uncompromising terminology is used by those who at the same time are seeking to understand the minds and culture of their enemies. Those who commit such acts usually talk about sacrifice rather than suicide. It is our inability to understand and appreciate the concept of sacrifice in a world that is dominated by the values of personal fulfilment that leaves us unarmed in this respect.

There is in fact, a long history of people prepared to commit suicide – or sacrifice themselves – for what they perceive to be a greater good. This encompasses both the Arab world and the West, and both religious and secular movements. It stretches back throughout the twentieth century and far beyond. The Tamil Tigers for instance, fighting for their independence in Sri Lanka, were just one of the latest expressions of this in a non-religious organisation.

But we also need to ask ourselves where we draw the line between unacceptable suicide and selfless sacrifice, as well as who decides. When the Soviet army rolled into Hungary in 1956, there were a number of incidents where young teenagers climbed onto the tanks, opened the hatches and dropped Molotov cocktails into them. They did not have a guaranteed chance of getting away with it. But they were not labelled as suicide bombers, rather they were called heroes (20).

It is perhaps a measure of how we now live in a post-heroic age, with a contemporary culture that prefers to fixate upon the victims of particular incidents – whereby we remember people by what happens to them rather than by what they do in the world – that we are now unable to contemplate – still less encourage – such forms of activity. And yet, one would hope, that the military at least, had internalised some sense of fighting for a greater common good if they are to be effective in their endeavours.

Unfortunately, one of the lessons of the war in Iraq is that this too may no longer be the case. Moans about boots that did not fit, guns that could not fire, tanks that could not move in the desert and armour that had to be shared, are not unusual. The British Army has a long tradition of going to war ill-equipped. What is new is that these complaints achieved such prominence in the media and that they continued long into the conflict. Normally, the exigencies of war makes people focus and forget their gripes. But now, their continuation reflects a deeper malaise, an uncertainty amongst the military themselves as to what they were doing there and why (21). And if they were unclear, what hope for the rest of society?

What lies behind this is a broader culture where sacrifice, commitment, or the search for transcendence beyond oneself, has largely disappeared. Increasingly, we live for ourselves and we live for the moment. Popular philosophers and policy-makers debate how to maximise happiness and personal choice (22). A certain degree of hardship in achieving greater goals is now rarely entertained, let alone encouraged.

Worse, there has, over the course of little more than a single generation in the West, been a near catastrophic demise of all-manner of social networks that once provided its citizens with a sense of purpose and shared meaning. From formal participation in the political sphere to engagement with informal groups and associations, the collapse of commitment and loyalty has been well documented (23).

This has shaped a society where the avoidance of risk and the pursuit of personal goals have become dominant values. It is this that leaves us unable to fathom – and incredulous in the face of – those who might think otherwise.

At the end of the BAFTA-award winning BBC documentary series *'The Power of Nightmares'* (24), I pointed to the fact that as we increasingly live in a society that believes in nothing, so fear can control everything. We are particularly scared of those who appear to believe anything. Accordingly, we label these as fundamentalists or fanatics. But that is not a measure of their strength or religious ardour, rather it is an expression of how much we in the West have changed.

Fixations with Sexual Depravity

My other vignette into the contemporary Western psyche and its current weaknesses stems from the pictures of prisoners being abused at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. I do not seek to diminish the responsibility of those directly concerned, but it is vital that we understand their actions through the cultural prism of our own societal values, rather than merely as being representative of their individual failings.

There is a long and ignoble history of torture being used in war and other conflicts. In the main, this can be divided into two groups. Cases where, however unpalatable, those responsible for the torture felt that they had a broader purpose in so-doing, typically to extract vital information from captives in situations where time was of the essence. Examples of this would include certain episodes in the French war in Algeria, as well as some situations relating to the United Kingdom's struggles against the Provisional IRA.

There are other instances of torture, or abuse, where such an aim is clearly lacking. These would include certain actions taken by the retreating German army against Russians on the Eastern front in the Second World War. A number of incidents perpetrated by US troops against the Vietnamese would also fit into this category, notably the My Lai massacre in 1968, a wholly pointless and vindictive destruction of an entire village and its people in presumed retribution for hardships endured.

So where does Abu Ghraib fit into these categories? Or does it represent something distinctly new about the contemporary world?

In an insightful article for the New York Times Magazine, the recently deceased social commentator, Susan Sontag, pointed to some remarkable features pertaining to the photographs that few others picked up on (25). She noted that there are few historical instances of people depicting themselves alongside their acts of destruction. And when they do, they are usually grim-faced, rather than smiling and giving the thumbs-up to the camera. The exceptions relate to American lynch-mobs of the 1930s, but even here the photographs served as trophies in private collections rather than having been designed for wider public dissemination.

The pictures from Abu Ghraib portray the perpetrators and were also intended to be circulated as mobile phone picture messages. They are a silent testimony to the whereabouts and activities of those who took them, as if to prove that they had served in Iraq, in case explaining this to others would not be enough to satisfy them. They suggest a society where individuals are sensitive to the need to graphically present their identity – a society where image matters far more than insight.

But it is also possible to extend Sontag's analysis. The images released from Abu Ghraib and other prisons over the course of the conflict in Iraq did not emerge through a concerted effort of investigative journalism. Nor was it disgruntled former inmates and their relatives who alerted the world. The media had had many opportunities to explore these matters. They had been raised in a number of new releases and either missed or ignored (26).

The fact is that the pictures were released by the soldiers and guards themselves. And once they had started to emerge many more were provided from within the Pentagon, often from a very senior level. It must be a rare instance of an institution effectively briefing against itself at a time when many of its staff were still employed in active combat operations. They certainly caused a furore across the Arab world, as did similar pictures of British troops engaged in similar actions that were circulated later, but which had in fact been taken some six months previously.

When we examine the content of those photographs it is of course easy to become indignant. Some of the prisoners had been forced to simulate sexual acts both on themselves and on others. Who in the civilised world could condone such actions and poses? To which the only realistic answer, if we examine our own culture clearly enough, is that we do. We not only condone such acts but we positively encourage them, as any critical analysis of the contemporary media would reveal.

The Times opinion columnist and commentator, Mick Hume, has likened the images to the content of many reality television shows that now form the staple of much of our broadcast networks (27). Indeed, the last series of *'Big Brother'* on Channel 4 featured an episode where the so-called housemates had been kept in cardboard boxes for up to 27 hours. A number of them had masturbated whilst they were in there, a fact joyfully relayed to viewers in graphic detail.

We live in a culture where a mix of humiliation, titillation, voyeurism and outrage has increasingly become presented as the norm. And we are both horrified and fascinated by this in equal measure.

In fact, *'Big Brother'* is relatively tame compared to other programmes in the genre such as *'Jackass'* where people are filmed inflicting pain upon themselves and performing mindless stunts such as pushing themselves down staircases in supermarket trolleys. In the US, this has been superseded by a series called *'Bumfights'*, where hoboos or tramps were encouraged to defecate on camera and to beat each other up. The latter having been perceived as being too strong for UK sensitivities, led British programme controllers to present a film about the making of *'Bumfights'* instead. This suggestively described all of the content but left out the graphic detail.

But even without going to such extremes, the plethora of other reality-style programmes tells us something important about our culture. There are numerous lame make-over shows where people are encouraged to bare-all in public and effectively accept to be humiliated about the style of their homes, the clothes that they wear, the food that they eat – including an analysis of their stools – and the sex lives they lead – including heat-sensitive photography to record their more intimate moments for later discussion with ‘*experts*’.

Of course, taking a shot at so-called reality television is easy. To fully reveal the extent to which there has been a fundamental erosion of the barrier between what might be considered public and the once private realm it may be more effective to consider the changing form and content of television news coverage. It is not just the blanket coverage and prurient interest in the recent Michael Jackson trial that would feature here. Twenty-four hour rolling news appears to demand a constant focus on ‘*human interest*’ stories.

Journalists increasingly ask people how they feel, rather than reporting the facts as best they can (28). At press conferences organised for relatives of the bereaved or of those who have disappeared, there is an intrusive focus on private and intensely personal grief and emotion. And we have all, by and large become immune to it. This genre does not in fact reveal any aspect of the truth. As Sontag points out, photography is particularly problematic for presenting the real world because life is not as it appears (29). Yet such images have increasingly replaced informed insight in our experience and understanding of the world we live in.

It is not that surprising therefore, that a few of those charged with looking after the inmates at Abu Ghraib might wish to take a few images of their own. The poses might not have seemed that out of place at a raucous college fraternity party. But rather than blaming the individuals concerned, as many in the liberal media were want to do, labelling them as southern ‘*trailer trash*’, it may be more useful to point out the distinction between these – some of the most marginalised and powerless individuals in society – and those who truly shape contemporary culture.

For it is in fact the cultural elites who, having increasingly given up on upholding any system of belief and values of their own, hold that anything goes and that everything is equally valid in the post-modern world. It is they who create the new genres, script how they will work and even select those who will serve as housemates for the viewers at home. It is they who think it is cool to let it all hang out. And they are not minor figures either – the controller of Channel 4 television when Big Brother was brought to our screens is now Director-General of the BBC.

What we are witnessing is the gradual encroachment of a top-down degenerate culture that reflects, amplifies, encourages and celebrates private exposure as a form of entertainment. It is an expression of the absence of belief and values I alluded to earlier.

So What?

Focusing on the actions of individuals who engage in suicide bombing operations or those who abused prisoners at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, avoids having a debate as to the social meaning of our fixation with those phenomena. It precludes any deeper understanding of their social roots and origins and therefore, prevents us from arriving at an effective solution, other than controlling the actions of those concerned or worse, presuming in a pre-emptive or precautionary fashion that we might all engage in such acts and hence monitoring the activities of every member of society.

In a similar way, a focus on the greater barbarism some perceive in contemporary warfare and conflict, avoids debating the actual substance of those conflicts in the first place. After all, presumably it is war itself that people would like to see the end of, rather than merely the worst, or most media highlighted, aspects of it.

For instance, there has been, in the UK and elsewhere, a recent flurry of debate and revelations as to who said what to whom in the run up to the war in Iraq. This primarily takes the form of a debate as to the supposed legality of that conflict (30). Notably, this discussion as to what the Attorney-General did or did not advise the Prime Minister, or the status of the various UN directives, or even the role of the weapons inspectors in Iraq, avoids a thorny political debate as to whether it was right to wage war in a foreign country in the first place.

Unfortunately, when critics of war allow their moral presuppositions to dominate over a robust political challenge then there is a danger of their becoming less than critical, as they search for signs of any evidence to confirm their moral indignation, rather than seek to build a principled argument. They are more likely to believe stories of atrocity without checking the facts if these support their pre-determined positions. Developing a more substantial political counter is simply much harder work.

A recent example of this moralistic self-affirming phenomenon where barbarism is presumed, was the recent report about copies of the Koran being flushed down a toilet in a US detention centre, that appeared in the 9th of May 2005 edition of Newsweek and which was then uncritically repeated elsewhere (31). Understandably, the story led to further indignation across many Muslim communities and reportedly fuelled a number of riots, which included fatalities in Afghanistan.

There is nothing new here. In January 2005, Australian lawyer, Stephen Hopper, reported that his client, Mamdouh Habib, who had been held at Guantanamo Bay, had had a prostitute menstruate over him as part of the interrogation process there. Despite the sheer physical implausibility of such a statement, his views were then repeated in the New Statesman magazine and by the BBC, amongst others (32).

Yet, the more a minority of critical journalists researched the story, the less any of it was found to be true (33).

Firstly, it was not Habib who had been in this situation, it turned out that he had heard somebody else at Guantanamo talking about it. The use of hearsay, and even secondary hearsay, as evidence, may have been more critically investigated in a culture where we did not already allow this as evidence. But sadly, since the institution of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at The Hague, to deal with the purported crimes perpetrated by Serbs and others in Bosnia and elsewhere, this form of supposed evidence has now been deemed sufficient to serve in the conviction of individuals (34).

It also turned out that there had been no blood involved at all, rather a red marker pen had been daubed over the individual concerned, and the person doing so, rather than being a local prostitute, was part of the interrogation team. This may all still seem fairly shocking to some, but in fact, if we are not prepared to analyse issues critically and get the facts right, we are prone to allow our inclination to believe the worst direct policy in a way that will ultimately be of no help to those involved.

The willingness to project the content of prejudiced minds, filled with moral indignation, can be found repeated in many other stories of death, brutality and amputation that have emerged since the onset of the war on terror (35). They are matched by other recent examples of this trend. In a television interview to help build the Live 8 concert and associated events in the UK to raise awareness about poverty in Africa, the former pop singer Bob Geldof assured his audience that every day bodies of would-be African asylum seekers were being washed up on the shores of a tiny island off of the Italian coast (36).

Whilst statements by Mr. Geldof are usually best taken with a certain degree of incredulity, the immediate audience reaction suggested he had been believed. Again, those who bothered to investigate the claim found otherwise (37). It is not at all evident how such suggestions could actually help the plight of any who do seek refuge overseas. And in a similar manner, it is not clear how the cause of those still incarcerated without charge or trial at Guantanamo is best advanced through embellishing the facts, or sexing them up.

Highlighting barbarism is certainly not a political challenge to the US, the War on Terror, the War in Iraq, or the treatment of those still detained. Rather, at best, all that can be concluded from such moral posturing is that somehow we are all depraved, a suggestion that those who will advocate war can live with quite comfortably. Indeed, they may then suggest that their actions are designed to avoid the worst edges of human barbarism, rather than being politically bankrupt in the first place.

Conclusion

Our obsession and fixation with those we label suicide bombers reveals our own difficulty in believing that there may be more important causes in life beyond the self. It reflects our own loss of meaning and purpose for society.

The terrible images of abuse at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere – far from revealing the corruption of a few individuals from deprived social backgrounds – actually point to a more widespread erosion of values across the Western world. Indeed, the confusion of what is public and what is private that they reflect, is a confusion that has been actively promoted by our contemporary cultural and social elites.

The solution to these problems lies, not in moral posturing, but in mounting a robust and effective political challenge that would, amongst other things, entail questioning the right of any nation to interfere in the sovereign rights of others.

All of these phenomena show an unhelpful focus that now exists upon the symptoms of social problems, rather than a concerted effort to analyse and understand their causes. As such they offer no solutions.

The barbarisation of warfare is a symptom not a cause. The perception of warfare as barbaric points to the growing disconnect between social elites and those who have to carry out their actions, or live with their consequences.

But the solution can not lie in moral indignation at the epiphenomena of war, rather in challenging war itself, and to do this we will need to examine and critique ourselves, the real facts and our own culture first and foremost.

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