

Putting the logic of 1914 to rest

As we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, one basic question must be asked: Can 1914 repeat itself?

Every day we hear about wars being waged in nations from Central Africa to Central Asia. But this is only part of the picture. Basic thinking on international relations has changed dramatically in a century. While some nations still practice realpolitik, for many governments the personal well-being of the citizen is now the foundation of foreign policy. In Europe, we had a revolution in foreign affairs that replaced power politics with welfare thinking; a logic of war with a logic of values; a foreign policy based on the power of the state to serve the citizen.

After the terrible suffering of both world wars, the drive to build a welfare state, pioneered in Europe, is now the basis for legitimacy in international relations. While sovereignty remains important in relations between nations, ensuring the personal welfare of the individual citizen is the primary goal. The venues for this welfare-oriented foreign policy include international conferences, involving new classes of players, stakeholders like NGOs, the media and multinational companies. This has led to the globalization of the concept of human security and pushed a new social model onto the world stage.

The United Nations best embodies this transformation, with its special mandates in development, trade, the environment and the welfare of children. And since 1949 the Council of Europe has worked to help build a new international order; for the first time in history, citizens of the council's member states were granted the legal basis for pursuing their rights before an international body, the European Court of Human Rights. This is perhaps the most striking example of how the welfare of the citizen has superseded the power of the state.

War, in this context, has been rendered unthinkable to Europeans. For most of us in the West, when we discuss security, we're talking about social security and pension funds. While America may take an independent, traditional view on security issues, and go to war to defend its national interests, Europeans participate in military operations as international peacekeepers, in which the mission of the soldier is not about his country's foreign policy. American elections are won or lost by the promise to "make America strong again"; in Austria and other European countries, elections are won by those who promise to develop the welfare state even further.

To be sure, with the United States the only remaining superpower, able to conduct its foreign policy in the classical sense, waging war and concluding peace at its discretion, power politics has not disappeared. Arms spending, the international weapons trade and the various current wars suggest that many countries remain determined to follow the realpolitik course to national glory. So we live in a very divided world.

Many countries still wage war at will. But many others live in a post-Westphalian world, dominated by the aspirations of millions to improve their

daily lives. For these citizens, going to war again like in 1914 is simply not possible.

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