

Notes on the Next War: A Serious Topical Letter--by Earnest Hemingway
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Not this August, nor this September; you have this year to do in what you like. Not next August, nor next September; that is still too soon; they are still too prosperous from the way things pick up when armament factories start at near capacity; they never fight as long as money can still be made without. So you can fish that summer and shoot that fall or do whatever you do, go home at nights, sleep with your wife, go to the ball game, make a bet, take a drink when you want to, or enjoy whatever liberties are left for anyone who has a dollar or a dime. But the year after that or the year after that they fight. Then what happens to you?

First you make a lot of money; maybe. There is a chance now that you make nothing; that it will be the government that makes it all. That is what, in the last analysis, taking the profits out of war means. If you are on relief you will be drafted into this great profitless work and you will be a slave from that day.

If there is a general European war we will be brought in if propaganda (think of how the radio will be used for this), greed, and the desire to increase the impaired health of the state can swing us in. Every move that is made now to deprive the people of their decision on all matters through their elected representatives and to delegate those powers to the executive brings us that much nearer war.

It removes the only possible check. No one man nor group of men incapable of fighting or exempt from fighting should in any way be given the power, no matter how gradually it is given them, to put this country or any country into war. The first panacea for a mismanaged nation is inflation of the currency; the second is war. Both bring a temporary prosperity; both bring a permanent ruin. But both are the refuge of political and economic opportunists.

No European country is our friend nor has been since the last war and no country but one's own is worth fighting for. Never again should this country be put into a European war through mistaken idealism, through propaganda, through the desire to back our creditors, or through the wish of anyone through war, notoriously the health of the state, to make a going concern out of a mismanaged one. Now let us examine the present set-up and see what chance there is of avoiding war.

No nations, any more, pay their debts. There is no longer even a pretence of honesty between nations or of the nation toward the individual. Finland pays us

still; but she is a new country and will learn better. We were a new country once and we learned better. Now when a country does not pay its debts you cannot take its word on anything. So we may discard any treaties or declarations of intentions by any countries which do not coincide completely and entirely with the immediate and most cynical national aims of those countries.

A few years ago, in the late summer, Italy and France mobilised along their border to fight over Italy's desire for colonial expansion in North Africa. All references to this mobilisation were censored out of cables and radiograms. Correspondents who mentioned it in mailed stories were threatened with expulsion. That difference has now been settled by Mussolini's shift of ambition to East Africa where he has obviously made a deal with the French to abandon his North African plans in return for France allowing him to make war on a free sovereign state under the protection of membership in the League of Nations.

Italy is a country of patriots and whenever things are going badly at home, business bad, oppression and taxation too great, Mussolini has only to rattle the sabre against a foreign country to make his patriots forget their dissatisfaction at home in their flaming zeal to be at the throats of the enemy. By the same system, early in his rule, when his personal popularity waned and the opposition was strengthened, an attempted assassination of the Duce would be arranged which would put the populace in such a frenzy of hysterical love for their nearly lost leader that they would stand for anything and patriotically vote the utmost repressive measures against the opposition.

Mussolini plays on their admirable patriotic hysteria as a violinist on his instrument but when France and Jugo-Slavia were the possible enemy he could never really give them the full Paganini because he did not want war with those countries; only the threat of war. He still remembers Caporetto, where Italy lost 320,000 men in killed, wounded and missing, of which amount 265,000 were missing, although he has trained a generation of young Italians who believe Italy to be an invincible military power.

Now he is setting out to make war on a feudal country, whose soldiers fight barefooted and with the formations of the desert and the middle ages; he plans to use planes against a people who have none and machine guns, flame projectors, gas, and modern artillery against bows and arrows, spears, and native cavalry armed with carbines. Certainly the stage is as nearly set as it ever can be for an Italian victory and such a victory as will keep Italians' minds off things at home for a long time. The only flaw is that Abyssinia has a small nucleus of trained, well armed troops.

France is glad to see him fight. In the first place anyone who fights may be beaten; Italy's Black Caporetto, her second greatest military debacle, was administered by these same Ethiopians at Adowa when fourteen thousand Italian troops were killed or driven from the field by a force which Mussolini now describes as 100,000 Ethiopians. Certainly it is unfair to ask fourteen thousand troops to fight one hundred thousand but the essence of war is not to confront your force of fourteen thousand with a hundred thousand of anything. Actually the Italians lost more than 4500 white and 2000 native troops, killed and wounded. Sixteen hundred Italians were taken prisoners. The Abyssinians admitted losing 3000 men.

The French remember Adowa and less possibly though more recently, Baer and Braddock (who knows but what Owney Madden may have bought a piece of the Ethiopians?), and they know that anybody who fights may be beaten. Dysentery, fever, the sun, bad transport, many things can defeat an army. There are also a number of tropical diseases which can only become epidemic when given the opportunity afforded by an invading army of men unused to the climate and possessing no immunity against them. Anyone who fights near the equator can be beaten by the mere difficulty of keeping an army in the field.

Then France feels that if Italy wins or loses, the war will cost her so much that she will be in no position to make trouble in Europe. Italy has never been a serious problem unless she has allies, because she has no coal and no iron. No nation can make war without coal and iron. Lately Italy has tried to overcome this by building up an enormous air-force and it is her air-force that makes her the threat she is in Europe today.

England is glad to see Italy fight Ethiopia. First she may be whipped which, they figure, will teach her a lesson and lengthen the peace of Europe. Secondly if she wins that removes the annoyance of Abyssinian raids along the northern frontier province of Kenya and gives someone else the responsibility of suppressing the perennial Abyssinian slave trade across to Arabia. Next England must undoubtedly have an arrangement with the possible victor about the water project in north-eastern Ethiopia which she has long coveted for the watering of the Sudan. It is only logical that Anthony Eden should have arranged about that when he was in Rome recently. Lastly she knows that anything Italy finds and brings out of Ethiopia must come through the Suez Canal or, taking the long way around, the straits of Gibraltar, while if Japan had been permitted to penetrate into Ethiopia and thus gain a foothold in Africa what she took would go direct to Japan and in time of necessity there would be no control over it.

Germany is glad to have Mussolini try to gobble Ethiopia. Any change in the African status quo provides an opening for her soon-to-be-made demands for return of her African colonial possessions. This return, if made, will probably delay war for a long time. Germany, under Hitler, wants war, a war of revenge, wants it fervently, patriotically and almost religiously. France hopes that it will come before Germany is too strong. But the people of France do not want war.

There is the great danger and the great difference. France is a country and Great Britain is several countries but Italy is a man, Mussolini, and Germany is a man, Hitler. A man has ambitions, a man rules until he gets into economic trouble; he tries to get out of this trouble by war - A country never wants war until a man through the power of propaganda convinces it. Propaganda is stronger now than it has ever been before. Its agencies have been mechanised, multiplied and controlled until in a state ruled by any one man truth can never be presented.

War is no longer made by simply analysed economic forces if it ever was. War is made or planned now by individual men, demagogues and dictators who play on the patriotism of their people to mislead them into a belief in the great fallacy of war when all their vaunted reforms have failed to satisfy the people they misrule. And we in America should see that no man is ever given, no matter how gradually or how noble and excellent the man, the power to put this country into a war which is now being prepared and brought closer each day with all the premeditation of a long planned murder. For when you give power to an executive you do not know who will be filling that position when the time of crisis comes.

They wrote in the old days that it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. But in modern war there is nothing sweet nor fitting in your dying. You will die like a dog for no good reason. Hit in the head you will die quickly and cleanly even sweetly and fittingly except for the white blinding flash that never stops, unless perhaps it is only the frontal bone or your optic nerve that is smashed, or your jaw carried away, or your nose and cheek bones gone so you can still think but you have no face to talk with. But if you are not hit in the head you will be hit in the chest, and choke in it, or in the lower belly, and feel it all slip and slide loosely as you open, to spill out when you try to get up, it's not supposed to be so painful but they always scream with it, it's the idea I suppose, or have the flash, the jamming clang of high explosive on a hard road and find your legs are gone above the knee, or maybe just below the knee, or maybe just a foot gone and watch the white bone sticking through your puttee, or watch them take a boot off with your foot a mush inside it, or feel an arm flop and learn how a bone feels grating, or you will burn, choke and vomit, or be blown to hell a dozen ways, without sweetness or fittingness; but none of this means anything. No catalogue of horrors ever kept men from war. Before the war you always think that it's not you that dies. But you will die, brother, if you

go to it long enough.

The only way to combat the murder that is war is to show the dirty combinations that make it and the criminals and swine that hope for it and the idiotic way they run it when they get it so that an honest man will distrust it as he would a racket and refuse to be enslaved into it.

If war was fought by those who wanted to fight it and knew what they were doing and liked it, or even understood it, then it would be defensible. But those who want to go to the war, the élite, are killed off in the first months and the rest of the war is fought by men who are enslaved into the bearing of arms and, are taught to be more afraid of sure death from their officers if they run than possible death if they stay in the line or attack. Eventually their steadily increasing terror overcomes them, given the proper amount of bombardment and a given intensity of fire, and they all run and, if they get far enough out of hand, for that army it is over. Was there any allied army which did not, sooner or later, run during the last war? There is not room here to list them.

No one wins a modern war because it is fought to such a point that everyone must lose. The troops that are fighting at the end are incapable of winning. It is only a question of which government rots the first or which side can get in a new ally with fresh troops. Sometimes the allies are useful. Sometimes they are Rumania. In a modern war there is no Victory. The allies won the war but the regiments that marched in triumph were not the men who fought the war. The men who fought the war were dead. More than seven million of them were dead and it is the murder of over seven million more that an ex-corporal in the German army and an ex-aviator and former morphine addict drunk with personal and military ambition and fogged in a blood-stained murk of misty patriotism look forward hysterically to today. Hitler wants war in Europe as soon as he can get it. He is an ex-corporal and he will not have to fight in this one; only to make the speeches. He himself has nothing to lose by making war and everything to gain.

Mussolini is an ex-corporal, too, but he is also an ex-anarchist, a great opportunist, and a realist. He wants no war in Europe. He will bluff in Europe but he never means to fight there. He can still remember what the war was like himself and how he left it after being wounded in an accident with an Italian trench mortar and went back to newspaper work. He does not want to fight in Europe because he knows that anyone who fights may lose, unless of course one can arrange to fight Rumania, and the first dictator who provokes a war and loses it puts a stop to dictators, and their sons, for a long time.

Because the development of his regime calls for a war he chooses Africa as the place to fight and the only surviving free African state as his opponent. The Abyssinians unfortunately are Christians so it cannot be a Holy war. But while he is making Ethiopia Fit for Fiats he can, of course, suppress slavery on paper, and doubtless in the Italian War College, it looks like a foolproof, quick and ideal campaign. But it may be that a regime and a whole system of government a-ill fall because of this foolproof war in less than three years.

A German colonel named Von Lettow-Vorbeck with an original force of 5000 troops, only two hundred and fifty of whom were whites, fought 100,000 allied troops for a period of over four years in Tanganyika and Portuguese Africa and caused the expenditure of 72,000,000 pounds sterling. At the end of the war he was still at large carrying on guerrilla warfare.

If the Abyssinians choose to fight on in guerrilla warfare rather than make peace Italy may find that Ethiopia will be an unhealing wound in her side that will drain away her money, her youth and her food supplies and return men broken in health and disgusted with suffering and the government that sent them to suffer with promises of glory. It is the disillusioned soldiers who overthrow a regime.

It may be that this war in Africa will prolong the temporary peace in Europe. In the meantime something may happen to Hitler. I of the hell broth that is brewing in Europe we have no need to drink. Europe has always fought, the intervals of peace are only armistice. We were fools to be sucked in once on a European war and we should never be sucked in again.