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The practices of certain traditional or primitive societies can be instructive as to what might happen in a nuclear confrontation or a nuclear war. (Kahn 1948: 57)

So wrote Herman Kahn, the great guru who urged our serious consideration of the possibilities and consequences of nuclear war. The passage appears in his recent re-working of an earlier classic, the new version entitled *Thinking About the Unthinkable in the 1980's*.

I agree with Kahn on at least this much; that nuclear war is worth thinking about and that we may have something to learn from other societies, even smaller and, perhaps, simpler ones. The major thesis of this paper is that a consideration of Erie Indian warfare with the Iroquois is worth the effort in the hope that we have something to learn regarding the likelihood, conduct, and most particularly the outcome of a modern nuclear war.

It has long been a staple assumption of the "Mirror of Mankind" school of anthropology that we may gain significant insight into our own society by holding our traditional ancestors or pre-industrial cousins up for comparison. Margaret Mead took this line of thought seriously and paid the scholarly price for doing so in terms of loss of academic prestige even while she achieved popular acclaim.

Nevertheless, I follow Mead today in that my goals are less scholarly than speculative. Those who have come to receive answers will be less satisfied than those who are here to hear questions raised. I will offer no new facts about the Erie but will put familiar facts into what is, I hope, a new context. And like most students of the Erie who concern themselves with warfare I will probably seem at times to be less interested in them and more interested in the Iroquois, the victors, at least in the short run, in the war and the subject of a great deal of the literature. Erie voices were silenced in that war and our guesses regarding what they might have said are less satisfying than the many documented and established events, practices, and ideas of the Iroquois. Be that as it may, I will offer a brief survey of pertinent elements of Erie culture and warfare of the seventeenth century and then attempt to relate the purported functions of Erie warfare, the escalation of their war with the Iroquois, and the subsequent dispersal of the Erie to the modern situation. I hope to demonstrate the continuities between seventeenth century

Indian warfare and warfare today. In the end I will ask what lessons for conduct today can we draw from the Erie example. Their fate speaks eloquently to us and at a time when youthful concern regarding nuclear war is significant, when arms reduction talks are taking place, and while we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the end of the most costly war in human history this effort is of more than theoretical interest.

The Erie Indians are known almost exclusively from the archaeological record; little information about their culture and behavior derives from firsthand or even secondhand observation or report. They are, in fact, the "Lost Nation" so familiar, from placenames at least, to Lake County, Ohio residents. No record exists of a European setting foot in an Erie village (White 1978: 412). The primary sources for cultural data on the historical Erie are the annual reports, known collectively as the *Jesuit Relations* (Thwaites 1896-1901), sent each year by New World missionaries reporting their activities to their superiors in France. Even in these the reporting is secondhand since much of what is recorded is the summary of incidents and practices of the Erie related to the Jesuits by the Onondaga and Seneca Iroquois. As seemingly simple a fact as the location and extent of seventeenth century Erie villages is open to question. Marian E. White's discussion of the location of Erie villages (1978: 412-15) concludes that they had no permanent settlements located west of what is now Erie, Pennsylvania in the seventeenth century. Since there is no linguistic evidence available to determine the nature of the settlements in question we are unlikely to ever be certain about them.

The historic Erie appear to have been a typical Northern Iroquoian Indian society. Living in settled villages they combined a fishing and hunting economy with some cultivation of domesticated lands. Their material culture appears to have been relatively simple and characterized by canoes, snowshoes, and relatively crude pots; no spectacular earthworks or burial procedures exist to distinguish them. Of interest to the topic of warfare is the likely sexual division of labor which encouraged a mobile male population which spent a significant amount of

time hunting and fishing and a more settled female population, concentrating on child-raising and cultivation.

The Erie had the misfortune to be placed geographically amidst exceedingly truculent neighboring societies. To the west were various Algonkian neighbors, whose sixteenth and seventeenth century wars pushed the Erie population centers to the east. On the east were the Iroquois nations. These extremely warlike neighbors' confederacy may date only from the sixteenth century (Tooker 1978: 418-22) but the implications for the Erie were devastating. As Anthony F. C. Wallace views the Iroquois, warfare -- at least blood feuds -- were endemic to Iroquois society.

The overall material characteristics of Iroquois society were quite similar to that of the Erie. They relied on a mixed economy, exploiting hunting, fishing, and cultivation in proportions which probably were not very different from the Erie. Their sexual division of labor was also likely to have been similar to the Erie practices outlined above. But the Iroquois are distinguished from the Erie by at least two practices. The first is the confederacy, a form of representative government uniting five and then six Iroquoian societies: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. This organization succeeded in keeping the peace among the belligerent young men within the groups and may account for their vigorous pursuit of war with external societies, the second characteristic distinguishing them from the Erie. If we accept the Iroquois men's own high valuation of violence and retribution for loss we must agree that internal peace meant external war.

Iroquois warfare was never territorial in nature. Wallace (1968) views Iroquois aggressive behavior primarily from the psychological point of view and his case is convincing. On the one hand, individual Iroquois were kept in a constant state of psychological "mobilization." This implies a readiness to drop one's pose as a free-acting but peaceable individual in favor of participation in a group effort involving the sanctioned use of lethal weapons by the members of one society against those of another (Wallace 1968: 173-74). Exactly how it was that young Iroquois men were trained to make this switch is unclear -- the role of women in encouraging the transition is also interesting but unclear -- but that it happened is not open to doubt.

Certain elements in the transition were a high cultural value on revenge and retribution. Any relative's death was to be avenged by killing or adopting one or more members of the opposite

family, village, or society into one's own. The death of a relative then was the trigger for the initiation of hostilities of at least equal proportion toward the rival social unit.

The establishment of the Iroquois confederacy may have put a brake on warfare between the tribes and created pressure on the violent Iroquois to find or develop external rivals who were permitted as enemies. Remember that warfare was not for territorial gain but for the no less real but more ephemeral goals of revenge, retribution, and establishment of manhood. That this is more than a logical deduction is borne out in the Jesuit Relations. In 1654 it was reported that a band of Onondaga Iroquois took a French trapper captive, perhaps for trespassing on Onondaga land or at least competing with them for valuable pelts. An Onondaga chief offered himself to the French as a captive in return, until the trapper was returned unharmed which was eventually arranged. The Onondaga had no wish to make war with the French at that time. At a celebration in Montreal of this peaceful resolution gifts were exchanged and speeches made, the Onondaga spokesman pledging, as translated by the French and then into English, that Onondaga "young men will wage no more warfare with the French; but, as they are too warlike to abandon that pursuit, you are to understand that we are going to wage a war against the Erie" (Thwaites 1896-1901, 41: 16). Here we find simultaneous confirmation of the warlike tendency of the Iroquois and their desire to turn their belligerency toward an external enemy.

The usual level of Iroquois warfare with the Erie may not have taken on the self-aware and planned tone of the passage above. Much more typical probably of the individual nature of the motivation would have been the case of the Iroquois named Aharihon from the *Relations* of 1655. He is reported (Thwaites 1896-1901, 41: 191) to have burned 40 men in search of one who would suffer silently or better still have the courage and strength to hurl insults at his captors while burning. This level of stoicism would have been necessary to prove himself worthy of being counted as revenge for Aharihon's dead brother. The Erie captive in point proved woefully inadequate; he was to have been placed upright over a fire, burned to the waist in the course of one night, permitted to revive during the next day, and the burned fully during the following night. The disappointed Erie, far from suffering in silence, groaned, cried, and carried on so that the disgusted Iroquois permitted him to die on the first night but presumably continued his search for a worthy equivalent to his brother. The implications of values and standards such as these for the continuation of a feud are obvious.

Some analysts (e.g. Vayda 1968) approach the problem of the existence and perpetuation of warfare by inquiring into the positive results of warlike behavior. This train of thought, usually called the functional approach, might hypothesize that Erie and Iroquois warfare served to decrease the number of males in the population, perhaps bringing them into balance with the number of females, already low because these societies may have committed female infanticide due to a prejudice against female firstborns. A similar line of logic might wonder if endemic warfare would serve to disperse populations more evenly across the ecological zones inhabited by the societies and thus lead to a more efficient and equal utilization of resources. While it is undeniable that warlike behavior has effects on population size and density the short term effect seems always to be in the direction of lowering these numbers. A persuasive functional analysis would need to demonstrate that warfare serves to raise population or population density, or at least maintain them closer to the carrying capacity of the land. I know of no such analysis for the Iroquois-Erie situation and at this distance in time it is unlikely to be forthcoming.

The functional approach assumes that any cultural practice enduring over generations must have positive effects or else why would it be maintained? Of course there are no modern descendents of the Erie to inquire of regarding these positive effects, a fact which make me skeptical of the value of this logic, at least for the Erie. My preference is not to force the data to reveal positive results for such behavior but to look elsewhere for its justification.

More profitable than functional theory may be an approach which begins with certain common features of warfare looked at from both ends of the continuum, both the relatively simple blood feud and the much more complicated but still similar nuclear war. Our having had no experience of a nuclear war may make such an approach only theoretical but worthwhile nonetheless.

I think we can begin by agreeing that warfare must always be seen as an alternative among possible courses of action, never an absolute necessity or requirement. Even in the most violent-ridden of times and places lethal conflict takes place within a larger context of groups which face the choice of initiating, continuing, or ending the conflict even if by flight. An individual may choose to continue seeking revenge and prolong a violent episode or an entire nation can choose to abandon an on-going war, leaving the field of battle to others. One conclusion then is that warfare is initiated or

continued, whether by individuals or groups, because at least some of its participants believe that it is in their interest or to their benefit to continue. This places the focus of inquiry less on the overall benefits to society, as investigated or hypothesized by the functionalists, than on the interests perceived by individuals and groups who decide to wage war.

In Kahn's opinion, thinking about the unthinkable begins with the realization that choice is a factor to be considered in the nuclear age, just as it must have been for the Iroquois Aharihon, seeking revenge for the death of his brother. On the one hand he must have asked "Did this tortured Erie behave with sufficient dignity to even the score?" On the other, Kahn wonders "What would you do if you were the President of the United States and you had just been informed that a multimegaton bomb had been dropped on New York City? Would you choose to do nothing?" Unlikely, but the specific course of action to be taken is not especially obvious and the time pressure to come to a decision, objective or self-created, would be terribly pressing.

Assuming some military response to Kahn's hypothetical situation would be chosen, what would it be? Anything less than firing a massive retaliatory nuclear attack at the presumed enemy, which might lead that enemy to do the same to us, needs a careful consideration of alternatives. Without doubt, our government's consultants and representatives along with civilian help have played out many alternatives to many first moves in this imaginary war.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of the choice of action to be taken in this case, let us take note of the terminology in which we and our government have chosen to pursue the matter. War games have been played for some time but the action has moved from the practice fields of battle to the conference room with players grouped around maps, moving counters, flags, launching imaginary bombers and attacks, and responding to their opponents' moves. The resources available to war game players have expanded well beyond those of the classic actual wars -- Go and Chess -- to include new star wars weaponry, conventional as well as nuclear weapons, and the vagaries introduced by dizzying combinations of possible enemies, weapons, and objectives. The computer named Joshua in the movie "War Games" had some difficulty determining the best move in the game Global Thermonuclear War, concluding finally that the game could not be won and so should not be begun, but I'm not so sure human decision-makers would exhibit such restraint. Any observer of the recent world chess championship match is aware

of the ways in which chess games which have "no outcome," i.e., are draws, can still be fascinating. Players feel compelled to play, and in the deadly game of warfare this must not be permitted.

The point to be made is that the meaning through which we try to make sense of and plan for modern war is not the "biological implication" of the functionalists but through the metaphor of the game. Moves, pieces, attack, counter-attack, gambit, sacrifice, symbolic gestures -- all are part of the vocabulary of warfare and of game theory. Whether or not this represents a potentially disastrous linguistic confusion of reality and fantasy is an important question but of interest too is what this suggests about the part which warfare played in the minds of the Erie and Iroquois. Would they recognize the similarities between the contests of strategy we call games and the contests of power and destruction we call war?

Let's return to the question of the President who must make some response to the opening move of the bombing of New York City -- what is to be done? In the spirit of gaming, and probably in the spirit of modern warfare as well, you may have chosen to ascertain who made the first move and then retaliate by destroying one of his cities, perhaps the largest in population, or a major commercial center, or a militarily insignificant but culturally critical city. Exactly who the enemy is or which city is chosen is less interesting than the reasoning process you as President have

chosen to follow. If you have reasoned as above then you are following a line of thought which is remarkably similar to that followed by the Iroquois Aharihon in search of an equivalent to his brother. You both seek to respond with measured violence, firmly yet not randomly, not by destroying or attacking the entire enemy but just by selecting a target (or "piece") of similar value to the one you have lost.

Now, I think, we are ready to appreciate the lessons the Erie have to teach us. One is that an entire people can disappear, can be lost, if poor choices are made. Given the limited technology of the seventeenth century the complete disappearance of a "nation" in warfare is no small achievement; how much more efficient we have become today in this regard although the staggering number of humans today might prove more resistant to complete annihilation than did the Erie. The second lesson is another warning. The "tit for tat" logic which motivated Aharihon was one which, theoretically, served to limit warfare since it provided for the recognition of equal loss for both sides and therefore an honorable mutual agreement to end hostilities. But after forty deaths Aharihon was still seeking equity. Can either the initiator or the attacked in a nuclear war be certain that both sides will recognize equal sacrifice? I'm afraid not -- the rules of this game and values of the pieces, in spite of all the research and development, are not so clear -- and so it's a game I hope we never play. One lost nation is enough.

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