

The New Front in the Gaza Conflict

by [Brian Patrick Bolger](#) (December 2023)



Taken from Houthi video of hijacked ship

A new front has opened up in the Gaza conflict. The new front is not Lebanon or the West Bank. A new front whereby all the traditional forms of war have ended. The essential features of war, since the nation state ascendancy post-Westphalia^[1] were, in the Medieval period onwards, wars of the 'just state.' Wars were essentially conflicts between noble families, and, since the average European travelled in a maximum radius of 50 kilometres throughout their life, war was something 'out there', not 'imminent'. Conflicts didn't draw in disparate neighbours or nation states on the other side of the known world. This began post formation of nation states,

in the nineteenth century. It was also a consequence of the contradistinction between maritime ascendancy (the British Empire) and land based 'grossraums' (i.e., Germany in the twentieth century). The US inherited the mantle of the maritime ascendancy but is now losing it.

On November 19, Houthi rebels managed to kidnap the crew of an Israeli chartered ship in the Red Sea shipping lane. The import of this is not the disappearance of the poor crew of 25 non-Israelis but the nature of modern conflict. For Israel, another front. For the globalised world, another example of the dysfunctional nature of modern geo-politics. The Houthis descent from helicopter to capture the ship illustrates the fluidity, the fall of any semblance of 'morality' from International Affairs, the ending of borders, the end of diplomacy. The 'West' likewise has no moral imperative in their fight against terror, however appalling the terror attacks. The Lockerbie bombing, for so long attributed to Libya, is now pretty well known as an Iranian atrocity. However, the zeitgeist of the time meant it was more useful to target Gaddafi and give twenty years bird time to an innocent man.

No longer is diplomacy a chin wag between Napoleon and Alexander on a raft in the middle of the River Niemen at Tilsit in 1807, with fine wines and French cheeses. The 'forms' of war have changed; solutions are technical and violent. The approach is to find a 'technical' way of bombing, to war. The first port of call is to send nuclear armed ships to the Mediterranean. The age of diplomacy has shifted to the realm of 'computer games.' We are now in danger of technifying reality, we can become distant from its consequences, immune to the suffering.

The new front means two things. For the world it means globalised war and concerns. For Israel it means being embedded in a diaspora of terror, in a wider Islamic world. It was Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* which introduced the total

absolute boundaries of the nation state—yet this was balanced by the idea of the *justis hostis* and *magni homines* [2]. Even wars between kings tended to have an aspect of dynasty. On the other hand, the twentieth century brought what Ernst Junger termed ‘a mine that detonates silently’; in that he meant war for modernity was afar, total, against an ‘enemy,’ against the ‘rogue’ state, the ‘terrorist.’ The opposition becomes dehumanised, for this is the narrative of black and white, good and evil. Aligned with this movement to technicity and rationality, there was the abandonment of previous notions of ‘natural law’ allegiances prior to the nation state. That is, allegiances to other things besides economics, resources or ‘borders.’

Modern technical warfare has relegated diplomacy and conceptions of ‘natural law’ to the dustbins of history. Nation states today regard with contempt the instruments of international justice: the ‘United Nations,’ or ‘International Court of Justice.’ Such arbitration only works on an equal playing field; not on one of ‘show trials.’ Nation states have dubious origins. The Holy Roman Empire had the Pope or Emperor as the arbitrator of the status quo based on natural or customary law. Modern contestation more resemble the realms of pirates; rootless states with a fundamental commercial orientation. This leaves the world open to the death of diplomacy, a fight for resources, with no underlying ‘logos’ or law. Thus, modern liberal nation states abolished the *justis hostis* for the ability to strike the enemy for merely territorial reasons. Kant in his *On Perpetual Peace* [3] believed that economic cooperation would lead to perpetual peace. Hence there would be a ‘universal law’ based on a European concept of liberal democratic norms. This idea gained currency until the twentieth century advent of modern ‘total’ war.

There is no avenue for diplomacy between modern conflicting nation states and their constant assertion of geopolitical and

resource war. International laws are redundant for the institutions are impartial and cannot appeal to the new pluralistic world, as globalisation hits the buffers. The 'new front' of the post-liberal world is universal war, not universal peace.

[\[1\]](#) Treaty of Westphalia 1648

[\[2\]](#) 'Just enemy' and 'Magnificent men'.

[\[3\]](#) Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace*, (1939). New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/kant92280>

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