The Five Languages of War

David Perkins, Harvard Graduate School of Education, presentation at the 13th International Conference on Thinking, Norrkoping, Sweden, 17-21 June, 2007
Why do we choose war?
What war?
(Human Security Report, 2005, from the University of British Columbia)

Who’s choice?

‘Never again’

‘Bring ‘em on’
(George Bush, July, 2003)

Gain and God

No-win wars
(e.g. Davoodi, Clements, Schiff, & Dabaere, 2001; Collier, 1999).
Why do we choose war when peace is a better deal?
The five languages of war
The five languages of war

1. The language of gain and god
2. The language of dominance and resistance
3. The language of good and evil
4. The language of regrettable necessity
5. The language of zealous allegiance
“...of all the tasks which we have to face, the noblest and most sacred for mankind is that each racial species must preserve the purity of the blood which God has given it.”

– Adolf Hitler, Berlin speech of January 30, 1937, celebrating four years of Nazi rule
“As long as Jews cannot work in peace and security in their greenhouses, then the Arabs 4 meters from [murdered] Ronni Tsalah's greenhouses will not be able to work quietly in their field.”

– Settler Ayala Azran of Gush Katif, the Gaza strip.
“States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.”

"I would do it again today if it were against bin Laden."

— French General Paul Aussaresses, speaking in November 2001 of atrocities and torture in which he was involved during his role in maintaining French dominance in Algeria
“The vast majority of the American people ... support what we're doing ... so if there's a backlash pending, I think the backlash is going to be against those who are suggesting somehow that we shouldn't take these steps in order to protect the country.”

— Richard Cheney to the Press, December 20, 2005
Languages
Languages → Meaning systems
The Last Four Languages of War
#2 The language of dominance and resistance

Victim rage & intolerance of challenge

Reactance
(J. W. Brehm, 1966)

Hunter-gatherers, sedentary societies, & kleptocracies
(Guns, Germs, & Steel, Jared Diamond, 1999)

The world has changed out from under our ancient minds
#3 The language of good and evil

Moral vision & capuchin monkeys  
(Frans de Waal)

Plowshares into swords  
(Richard Nixon)

You can’t tell who’s right from the rhetoric  
(Bush & bin Laden)

Universalized ethics  
(John Rawls)
It may seem melodramatic to say that the US and Russia represent Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, God and the Devil. But if we think of it that way, it helps to clarify our perspective of the world struggle.

— Richard Nixon
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Universalized ethics  
(John Rawls)
#4 The language of regrettable necessity

The Prisoner’s Dilemma
(Rand Corporation, 1950, von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944)

Existential threat & tragic escalation

MAD
(Robert McNamara)

Beating the logic, dodging the logic
The language of zealous allegiance

The follower reflex
(Gallup Organization, Boston Globe, Sept 13, 2003)

Media control

Feeding to the lions
(B. Drainie, 2000, The Toronto Globe & Mail)
What is not published has not happened at all

— Attributed to Sloboban Milosevic, International Court of Justice testimony, 2004
#5 The language of zealous allegiance

The follower reflex
(Gallup Organization, Boston Globe, Sept 13, 2003)

Media control

Feeding to the lions
(B. Drainie, 2000, The Toronto Globe & Mail)
Groupthink
(Irving Janis, 1972)

Tribethink

Exclusive meaning system

Oppositional identity
With God on our side, we will stand together as one to resist these evil attacks and deliver the stern justice that sadly is required.

Gain and god
Zealous allegiance
Dominance and resistance
Good and evil
Regrettable necessity
Groupthink
(Irving Janis, 1972)

Tribethink

Exclusive meaning system

Oppositional identity
The puzzle of no-win wars

Why do we choose war when peace is a better deal?

The five languages of war

Tribethink

Exclusive meaning system focused on oppositional identity
Worldthink
Tribethink
Tribethink  →  Worldthink
Exclusive meaning system → Inclusive meaning system
The inclusive meaning system

1. The language of **mutual benefits and respect**

2. The language of **checks and balances**

3. The language of **equitable justice**

4. The language of **human rights**

5. The language of **multiple identities**
Exclusive meaning system $\rightarrow$ Inclusive meaning system
Fostering worldthink

Critical awareness

Five languages of peace

Dual presence

The language of action
civil protest, satyagraha (Gandhi), civil disobedience (Thoreau, 1864)
shared attitudes

political
structural support
Fostering worldthink

Critical awareness

Five languages of peace

Dual presence

The language of action
civil protest, satyagraha (Gandhi), civil disobedience (Thoreau, 1864)
Question to Mohandas Ghandi

What is your view of Western Civilization?

Answer

I think it would be a very good idea.