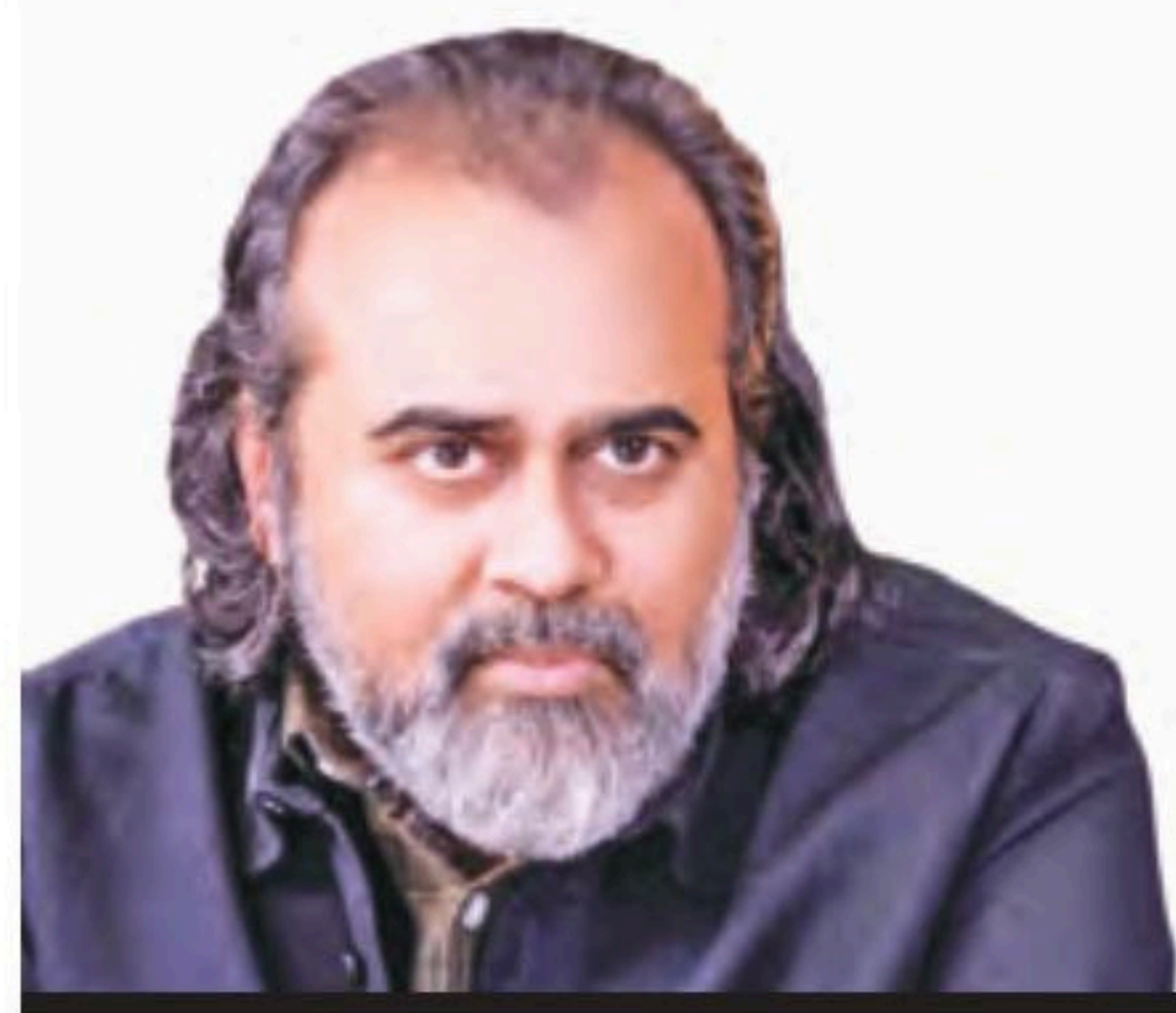




Why do nations go to war?



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There is a question that goes unasked every time the world erupts in war, and its absence is more revealing than anything the analysts say. The question is not about which side is right, or which grievance is legitimate, or which alliance has been betrayed. Those questions get asked at great length, with great sophistication, by very worldly, credentialed people. The question that does not get asked is simpler and more dangerous: who is the one fighting? Not which nation, not which ideology, not which scripture, but who, actually, is doing this, what does this person want, and why does the wanting never stop?

In recent weeks, US and Israeli strikes on Iran have killed several top military and political figures; Iran retaliated against Israeli positions and American bases in the Gulf; Pakistan launched strikes into Afghanistan; and all this while the devastating war in Gaza is still quite fresh in the collective memory. Across every editorial room and foreign ministry, the same machinery cranks into motion: geopolitical analysis, balance-of-power calculations, resource competition, historical grievance mapping. These explanations are not wrong, exactly. They describe the furniture of the room quite well. But what they do not explain is who is sitting in it, or why that person keeps setting the room on fire and then expressing surprise at the flames.

Consider what a single historical fact does to the entire geopolitical narrative of the current US-Iran crisis. Until 1979, Iran and Israel were functional allies. Two countries that today describe each other in the language of surgical removal and satanic identity, “the cancerous tumour must be excised,” “the Little Satan must perish,” were, within living memory, strategic partners. What changed was a revolution that placed religious identity at the absolute centre of the Iranian state. The Islamic Republic made opposition to Israel a central ideological position of the new state, not because Israel had done anything new, but because a state founded entirely on theological identity requires its identity to be defined against something. A Jewish state served that purpose with theological precision.

This is not geopolitics wearing a religious costume. This is religion being worn by the ego as its most respectable armour, and it tells us everything we need to know about the nature of the conflict. Religion exists to civilise the animal. Every great tradition, at its irreducible

core, was attempting to do one thing: take the creature that emerges from the womb driven entirely by the biological logic of survival: consume, expand, eliminate the threat, secure the territory, and elevate it into something capable of clarity, compassion, and self-knowledge. That is the whole project. The animal, however, is remarkably resourceful. It can colonise the very force meant to tame it; it can drape itself in scripture, recite the holy verses with genuine feeling, and emerge looking not like a beast at all, but like a soldier of God. When that happens, religion does not merely fail at its purpose; it becomes the most potent accelerant the ego has ever discovered, because now the hunger for dominance carries the blessing of the divine, the violence is sanctified, and the enemy is not merely an adversary to be defeated but a heretic whose destruction is itself an act of devotion.

Not Resources, But Identity

Strip away the theological dressing and the geopolitical framework, and what remains is something both simpler and more intractable: the ego’s bottomless hunger to feel complete, a hunger no diplomatic architecture has ever been built to address, because the architects themselves are running the same engine.

The resource explanation for the US-Iran confrontation is the most persistent alibi and the most easily dismantled. The United States is among the world’s largest energy producers; it has no material need for Iranian oil that could justify the risks of direct military confrontation with a nation of ninety million people in one of the world’s most volatile regions. What it fits

is the logic of an ego that requires dominance not as a strategy but as a psychological condition; an ego that cannot tolerate the existence of an entity that refuses to

subordinate itself to the hierarchy. You cannot give it enough. Feed it every oil field in the Gulf, and it will discover it needs recognition; give it recognition, and it will discover it needs submission; give it submission, and it will discover it needs the annihilation of any future possibility of challenge. The hunger has no floor because the hollowness it is trying to fill has no floor either. Everything else: the sanctions, the strikes, the frameworks, the summits, is rearranging weapons into configurations that feel temporarily safer and calling the rearrangement peace.

There is a temptation, particularly for citizens of the nations doing the striking, to watch all of this from a position of apparent safety: to feel either pride at a display of power or simple relief that the devastation is happening at a geographical distance comfortable enough to be consumed as news. This is the ego’s most seductive illusion: that the fire it lights in the world stays in the world, that you can sanction the destruction of other people’s cities and return to your own life carrying none of that destruction inside you.

The inner condition that produces belligerent foreign policy is the same inner condition that produces the epidemic of depression, anxiety, addiction, and inner purposelessness that has become the defining psychological signature of the most militarily powerful societies on earth. You cannot burn your neighbour’s house and rest in peace, not because of some mystical law, but because the act of burning changes the one who burns, and that changed person then returns to the home he imagined was safe and wonders why he cannot sleep. The senses are made to face outward, and therefore, the ego, using only the senses, sees only what is outside, never what is within. This is the structural predicament of the geopolitically entranced ego: it looks outward at the adversary, at the threat, at the historical injustice, and it never pauses to notice that what it keeps finding out there, the hunger, the fear, the need for enemies, the certainty of its own righteousness, is a precise mirror of what has never been examined within.

Ask yourself what genuinely disturbs you when you read the news from that region. If you find that a missile strike produces something that feels uncomfortably close to satisfaction, a sense that the right people are being punished, that your side is winning, that the world is being corrected, sit with that feeling for a moment before moving to the next headline. Ask what it is fed by. Ask what it would mean for your sense of identity if the world stopped arranging itself into enemies you could feel righteous about. The ego that requires enemies to sustain its own sense of coherence does not disappear when the missiles stop. It waits until it finds the next available occasion. And the wheel turns again. The wheel will not be stopped from the outside.

There is no treaty elegant enough, no balance of power stable enough, no diplomatic architecture sophisticated enough to address what keeps turning it. The wheel is turned from within, by the unexamined centre that has been given every instrument of analysis and statecraft except the one that could actually change something: the willingness to look at itself with the same ruthlessness it has always reserved for its enemies. That is the only disarmament that lasts. Not a new agreement, not a new government, not a new ideology dressed in the vocabulary of the old one, but just a human being, finally willing to ask: what in me is producing this world, and what would remain of my sense of who I am if I could no longer find an enemy to confirm it? That question, honestly pursued, is the beginning of the only peace that has ever been real.

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