**Reclaiming the Kellogg-Briand Pact**

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| By (name) - posted Tuesday, 1 April 2014 | [Sign Up for free e-mail updates!](http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/display.asp?page=subscribe) |

The Kellogg-Briand Pact, otherwise known as the General Treaty for the Renunciation of War, or simply the Pact of Paris, is one of the most interesting of all modern treaties.  This was a treaty signed in 1928 by most of the nations of the world, including Australia, and by which the signatory nations pledged to renounce war as an official instrument of national policy and to use peaceful means to resolve disputes. One of the interesting facts about this Treaty is that it is still current.  There are a number of reasons why I would suggest it is now appropriate to reclaim this Treaty in the popular imagination.

The first reason is that the Treaty coincides with other international commitments.  For instance, the 1999 United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, commits the signatories to promoting non-violence and a culture of non-violence.  The Preamble to the UN Charter indicates that the basis for the organization is to prevent succeeding generations from experiencing the “scourge of war”, and the constitutional mandate for UNESCO commits that organization to encouraging a culture of peace.  The value of the Kellogg-Briand Pact is that this commitment to peace is made a little more concrete and a little more explicit.

The second reason is that the Kellogg-Briand Pact is more relevant than ever, given current international politics. It is arguable that we live in a world where there has been a relative absence of inter-state armed conflict in recent years.  However the paradox is that the potential for inter-state violence is more apparent than ever, with growing major power rivalries now evident in the Western Pacific and in Eastern Europe.  It is instructive to remember that in 1914 the world had experienced a time of relative peace, but that peace soon came to an end.  I contend the ideals of the Kellogg-Briand Pact are now more important than ever.

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The third reason is that aspirational goals are important. Goethe once wrote that the potential we identify is the potential we will tend to fulfil.  It is true that the Kellogg-Briand Pact did not stop fascist aggression in the 1930s, leading to global war.  Yet I would suggest that this only underscores the importance of educating and publicizing why such a Pact is important, that is, why it is important for nations to renounce war as an official instrument of policy, and why it is important for nations to commit to pacific and diplomatic means for the resolving of disputes. Ideals are worth working on.

The fourth reason is practical.  The Kellogg-Briand Pact is often criticized as being overly idealist, and yet it was on the basis of the Pact that the Nuremburg Tribunal and the Tokyo Trials prosecuted those who had led the world into yet another world war.  It is timely to remind ourselves that using war as an instrument of national policy is contrary to international law, and that those who do so are war criminals.  Many would argue that there are many such contemporary war criminals yet to be prosecuted, although this in itself is yet another reason why the Kellogg-Briand Pact needs to be publicized.

The final reason is cultural. We live in strange times, with a wide recognition of the destructiveness and futility of war, and yet we witness a popular culture which increasingly celebrates participation in violent conflict as the defining mark of courage and identity.  Any statement which explicitly rejects the value of war, and in particular which rejects war as an instrument of national policy, is useful in these circumstances.  Such statements help undergird a rejection of the culture of violence, which is so pervasive.  The Kellogg-Briand Pact is one such public statement.

How do we go about re-claiming the Kellogg-Briand Pact within the popular imagination, or, to put the question another way, how do we obey the law against war?  I would suggest what needs to happen is that national and international leaders of opinion ought to be encouraged to speak out on the importance of the Kellogg-Briand Pact and its relevance today.  For the United Nations, one practical innovation would be the establishment of an International Day for the Renunciation of War, as a means for raising consciousness.  Whatever the means, it is difficult to gainsay the relevance of the Pact, and the need for this to be reclaimed as a pressing one for our times.

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