

THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST AND ALTERNATIVES TO WAR

On the War in Ukraine

Authors: Xavier Bohigas, Pere Brunet, Blanca Camps-Febrer, Tica Font, Teresa de Fortuny, Tomàs Gisbert, José Luís Gordillo, Mario López, Pere Ortega, Ainhoa Ruiz Benedicto



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine turned a widespread social conflict and the armed conflict along the Russia/Ukraine border into a conventional war after the invasion in 2022, contravening the international right to national territorial sovereignty. Like all Western wars, this war has sparked new and old debates at various levels of society. Issues such as the best defence models, involvement in wars in other countries, the arms trade, the role of international bodies in global conflicts, and the shaping of global geopolitics once again dominated the news and our social discourse.

This report stands against this war, and against all wars. It draws on some of the most common social arguments, debates and narratives that spring up when a new war breaks out, to challenge the hegemonic militarist narrative by providing a few of the ethical and political reflections from political pacifism. We are aware that we will not be able to address all of them in a publication of this nature.

ON THE JUSTIFICATION OF WAR

- Political pacifism highlights two essential ideas: first, that war is inherently unjust, and so debates over when it can be justified are irrelevant. And second the need for consistency coherence between means and ends. Justice cannot be achieved by methods that are not, likewise, just.
- The United Nations' legal architecture concentrates decision-making power in the UN Security Council. Its permanent members have veto rights, meaning they can block resolutions that go against their interests. In this sense, the UN Security Council's five members are in a position of *de facto* impunity from the laws they themselves dictate. This position is akin to that of an absolutist monarch.
- A range of diverse military invasions did not meet a military response - they were answered with nonviolent tactics. The most successful happened in the Ruhr region of Germany when France and Belgium invaded in 1923, and in Denmark and Norway when the Nazi's invaded in 1940, and in 1968 when Warsaw Pact and Soviet troops entered Czechoslovakia.
- When the discourses argue that the West is defending liberal values and bringing democracy and freedom to countries such as Ukraine (or Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and so many others), it's a good idea to check those countries' indicators, which have not improved, in terms of: increasing women's freedom, greater equality, or greater security in terms of housing, food, health and education.

ON THE ALTERNATIVES TO WAR

- In 1991, in the face of the threat of an invading army, the three Baltic republics developed plans for unarmed civil resistance. The Government of Lithuania drew up a civil resistance plan based on non-cooperation and disobedience; Latvia created the Center on Nonviolent Resistance, which issued recommendations on what to do in the face of military aggression, and the Estonian government drafted a manual giving civilians specific instructions on how to resist an invasion.
- Various studies demonstrate that nonviolent action is more successful in achieving political objectives than armed violence. A total of 268 campaigns between 1950 and 2014 have been studied (153 violent, 115 involving civil resistance). Of these, 51% of the civil resistance campaigns were successful, whereas only 30% of the armed struggles achieved their goals. A well-organised civil society can pose a serious challenge and threat to power and the authorities.
- After a war, agreements or pacts impose one side's will over the others. But much better conflict solutions are reached through dialogue, because these are based on willingness to make concessions. Lasting solutions to conflicts are almost never based on defeating the other.
- Government responsibility by action or inaction must be examined in any conflict. If people like Hitler came to power, we need to look at the causes that made this possible, which include: the war reparations imposed on Germany after World War I; support for Nazism as a way of stopping Soviet and communism, and the support US magnates gave the Third Reich in order to obtain a share of the colonial resources previously controlled by the United Kingdom and France.

ON WHY AND HOW TO AVOID WAR

- The climate crisis is now at a point of no return. In this context, the military security model becomes instrumentally responsible for environmental disaster, because it secures and protects fossil fuels and predatory actors, maintaining the *statu quo*. Decarbonisation implies demilitarisation.
- The conscription of thousands of Russian and Ukrainian men is profoundly discriminatory. It defines all men as potential combatants, and those who want to help solve the conflict in other ways as traitors, not only to their country, but also to their gender and their gender obligations. This stigmatises and makes invisible any men who refuse to wage war, out of fear or conviction.
- In 2017, the United Nations adopted The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. None of the nuclear powers have ratified it. If we want to achieve peace in Europe after the war in Ukraine, a commitment to the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from European soil will be highly desirable.

- Physical damage is the most visible scourge of war, but conflict also has a brutal impact on mental health, on the destruction of culture and the tearing apart of the fabric of community, as shown by the indicators from various conflicts. War also reinforces patriarchal values and leads to values of affiliation being replaced by values of confrontation.

CONCLUSIONS

The war in Ukraine is not a Just war, because there are not morally just wars. The hegemonic realism of the powers has used wars to justify the violence involved in achieving their political goals, which include peace as the end product of war. Pacifism is the truly realistic option, as it proposes achieving peace without violence, which is the only way to build conditions for peace that do not give rise to new causes of future violence. Perspective is key to determining the just nature of a war. The winning side will see war as just, necessary, and legitimate, and will leave this view in writing in their dominant narrative, while the losing side will perceive it as unjust. In all cases, the victims' pain, which is the pain of those who have suffered human and material losses, will not allow them to accept that the war was just.

Just as the legitimacy of a war answers political interests, so does its legality. While the international structures of peace and security created after World War II, whose greatest exponent is the United Nations, aim to avoid war, its internal power structures determine the legality of war based on the balances of power and the will of great powers with veto rights. The Geneva Conventions do not prohibit, but regulate war, making the damage incurred politically acceptable. Nevertheless, despite international humanitarian law, civilians are and always will be those who suffer most. This situation is protected by international legislation that subjugates the legitimacy of wars to political power and is incapable of protecting the civilian population in situations of armed conflict.

In the war in Ukraine, as in many other wars, the path of legitimacy has been pursued through the 'right to legitimate defence', which is included in international peace regulations and central to the UN Charter. The development of the legitimate right to self-defence tends to overlook other ways of defending yourself, without needing to resort to war. Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and Sharp's nonviolent strategies have been used on countless occasions in major political conflicts, avoiding or preventing military responses to security challenges, political transformations and even to military aggression. Citizens' non-violent responses to the Nazi invasion, Soviet expansion or during the Arab Springs show that governments and societies have the tools to resist military invasion before resorting to war and causing worse damage than that which they aim to avoid.

The war in Ukraine has ultimately tried to find justification as a war in the name of freedom and democracy. It is inevitable that the different sides of an armed conflict will develop a political narrative that supports their decision to resort

to war in order to achieve their territorial, economic or other objectives. But political accounts of war are not objective, they answer the needs of those who undertook them to find legitimisation. Democracy and freedom are perhaps the predominant narrative of the war in Ukraine and most contemporary armed conflicts. However, when we scratch the surface of the stories told by both sides, we find reasons or causes related to political, economic or social issues, and the desire for power on all sides. One of the main reasons for Western involvement in the war in Ukraine seems to be NATO's quest to political and economically weaken Russia. Otherwise, how do you explain the lack of US and her allies' military intervention in the many other armed conflicts around the world.

There are alternatives to the use of armed violence in political conflicts, in other words, alternatives to war do exist, and this is or was also true in Ukraine. Nonviolent civilian responses to major political challenges in Ukraine over the last decades prove this is true: they achieved changes in government through peaceful revolts. Nonviolent activism in all its forms is an option that has not only borne recent fruit in Ukraine, but all over the world. Studies prove that nonviolent campaigns are twice as successful as armed struggle. Chenoweth and Stephan, Schock, Npestad and López have studied hundreds of conflicts, showing that violence is not necessary to overthrow a repressive regime, and that the best way of doing so is to adopt democratic values. This relates to our proposal to do away with the discourses of victor and vanquished and replace them with those of agreements based on compromise to achieve lasting solutions. The use of violence, or war, prevents future peace commitments because the damage inflicted is insurmountable. Alternative discourses to war largely emerge from feminisms. Patriarchal dominance implies the use of violence to achieve political objectives: states using military structures. Feminism, as opposed to patriarchy, and pacifism, as opposed to violence, are the realistic alternative to warmongering discourse. It is worth remembering that the alternative to war against an authoritarian, dictatorial and undemocratic political figure, such as Vladimir Putin, is also responsibility by governments that supported, complicitly accepted, or simply allowed to evolve into confrontational positions, by their own actions or omissions, promoting scenarios in which choosing war becomes more plausible.

In conclusion, it is both possible and desirable to avoid war. By dedicating our efforts as a society, led by governments, to avoiding war, by not preparing and planning military defence, we will allow ourselves to focus on answering important priorities, such as the fight against climate change, which is an issue of planetary (not merely national) importance.

A realistic but critical and constructive reading of the situation is fundamental to improving international relations and avoiding war. Doing so allows us to see that conflicts between states or other powerful groups are resolved using a patriarchal, competitive logic, which contributes to the normalisation of militarism and war as the only solution to political conflicts. The current liberal alternative based on multilateralism and cooperation between states is a first step towards peaceful conflict resolution, but it is not enough, as

it does not address the underlying structures and other elements of dominance in the international system that need to be determinedly addressed if we want to eliminate war, not only in the international treaties, but also in political practice. Nuclear weapons may be one of the elements that, if not eliminated, influence global political decision-making processes and armed conflicts in particular, as in the war in Ukraine. This is due to both their power as a deterrent, due to the risk of a nuclear disaster resulting from military escalation that can lead any leader to carry out a nuclear threat. As this is a global threat, we are all jointly responsible for it, which makes failing to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) extremely reckless from the perspective of global political security.

If a sincere, honest, democratic analysis of the human, social, economic, political, cultural, environmental and obviously security impact of war were made before launching into a conflict to which nobody can predict an end; if we emphasised avoiding the damage war causes, avoiding human pain and suffering, avoiding the destruction of infrastructure and ecosystems; then the decision to start a war would seem so impossible that any other option will always be better. Military intervention and war do not create a better world, although the victors always rewrite history to make us believe that the violence and inevitable crimes committed in the war that brought them to power, were heroic acts worthy of praise.



If you appreciate our research
and want to help us keep our rigour and independence,
you can become a member
or make a donation by scanning the
QR code or on this link:
<http://centredelas.org/fes-te-soci-a/?lang=en>

CENTRE DELÀS
D'ESTUDIS
PER LA PAU

Read the full report at:
<https://centredelas.org/publicacions/contralesguerres/?lang=en>

With the support of:

