**War is always terrible**

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On **May 6, 2022**

War is never good. War is never fair. War never solves any problem. War is never holy, or is it? History is full of such wars, but if we look closer at them, they are about power, land, oceans, resources, wealth and riches, and the right to rule and control, collect taxes, and more. Ethnic backgrounds, heritage, and race may also play a role, interwoven with other causes. War can be about religion and faith, fully or partly. Culture, language and ideology play their roles.
In the current Russian war in Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church, the official church of the main religion in the land, is used to support the war. The secular and religious leaders claim that Russia defends moral and social standards that the West has given up. We may not agree with the Orthodox Church, but it does have power and plays an important role. The main church in Ukraine is also the Orthodox Church, but it broke away from its Russian leadership in the church a few years ago.
It should be noted that in all wars and conflicts, religion becomes important, even to those who otherwise wouldn’t consider themselves strong believers. In Ukraine, five million people have managed to leave the country and have become refugees, and within Ukraine, some seven million have become internally displaced (IDPs). Many civilians and soldiers have been killed or injured. We have seen terrible pictures on TV and social media and read articles in the newspapers. Many Russian soldiers have been killed and are sent home to parents, wives and loved ones in body bags and coffins.
During such situations, people seek comfort and hope in their faith. In the spirit of God, some even find a space in their heart for forgiveness of the cruelty, devastation, death and destruction. In terrible situations, people also try to remember positive things and help from friends and family, even enemy soldiers and strangers. In the current Russian war in Ukraine, people blame the leaders of the Russian regime, not the Russian people, who carry little or no responsibility in a country with little or no democracy. If people in any country were asked, I wonder if they would support aggression and war against another country.
The Russian war in Ukraine is terrible. Since it is in Europe, in a modern land, with good infrastructure and institutions (yet, also with political shortcomings and corruption), and indeed extensive media coverage supporting Ukraine, we learn more about the cruelty of this war, and any war. We must not forget that all wars are terrible and cruel. Last week, I read an article by a group of researchers at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway, reminding us of this. The invasion of America and the West in Afghanistan, which lasted for 20-years and ended less than a year ago, left some 300,000 dead and many injured, and many forced to move within their land or abroad. The wars in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere, are certainly also terrible, as was indeed the America Vietnam War from 1955-1975. The West and America must not pretend they are kinder in any way in wars than others.
When wars begin, there are always lost opportunities to avoid war and conflict, and there were even forces that wanted war. However, even in our time, and indeed in Europe, the world’s most modern region, the yearlong Russia-Ukraine conflict came to full war from 24 February 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine, but intelligence and other information had shown the risk. The two countries at war, indeed the invader, bear the main burden for not finding a peaceful solution. There was a build-up to the war over a long time, certainly from 2014 when Crimea was annexed by Russia, but there were also signs earlier, with serious development and democracy problems in both Russia and Ukraine before that, all the way back to the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-91. It should have been obvious for the West, indeed the United Nations, the European Union, and other organisations, that there was a serious need for help to both countries’ governments, the private sector, and organizations. Instead, the West focused on a military build-up, with NATO more and more defining itself as an alliance against Russia. Ukraine began to orient itself to become a Western country, also militarily, opposed by Russia. Alas, it seems that the West was quite deaf and blind to Russia’s concerns. Russia on its side should certainly have done more to modernise and democratise.
Furthermore, we should know that Ukraine has become a major exporter of arms, military equipment and machinery. Less than ten years ago, it was listed as the eight largest exporters in the world; India, inter alia, has bought military equipment from Ukraine. Much of the military industry in Ukraine was in Eastern Ukraine in areas which have been terribly affected by the war and are likely to be annexed by Russia.
There are several important aspects of the Russian war in Ukraine which have been given little attention in the public debate. Although Ukraine is a big country with major military capability, I wonder if Ukraine should have responded militarily to the mighty Russia’s invasion. The West has assisted Ukraine with arms. True, if Ukraine had not made resistance, it might have led to Ukraine becoming a vassal state of Russia, at least as long as the current Russian regime lasts. On the other hand, maybe that would have been better than the terrible consequences of the war we now see, in many ways fuelled by the West.
As a pacifist, I would say that peaceful resistance and response to aggression would be the best response. If the aggressor knows that, too, war might have been avoided. We would all have liked to see more dialogue and peace efforts before the Russian war in Ukraine began. We should all have contributed more to seeking ways of negotiations and peace. This must be given major focus in the days and weeks to come.
Finally, let me draw attention to the two Nordic countries of Finland and Sweden, geographically near the Russian border. They feel the need to become NATO members soonest, fearing that they might otherwise have a fate like Ukraine, or if not, other conflicts with the ‘Russian bear’. Finland has a 1340 kilometres long border with Russia. Sweden has been a neutral or non-aligned country, with strong peace and anti-nuclear weapons movements. If the two countries become NATO members this year, which is likely, it will certainly be against Russia’s wishes, and the Western alliance would creep even closer to its borders. NATO’s budgets keep climbing to unprecedented heights, and it is about military capability, not a revised and alternative way of defence and peace creation for the future. NATO’s rearmament escalates the risk of war, although claimed to be for deterrence and peace.
The wars in the past have always been terrible, but the new sophisticated weapons and equipment, if used, could mean the cruellest of wars imaginable, yes, beyond imagination. Are we incapable of learning from the past and ongoing wars?
We have just celebrated the Muslim fast and Eid, and also the Christian fast and Easter. Now we must take God’s commandments seriously, at all times, and work tirelessly for all wars to end. Let us continue praying for peace on earth and do what we can to realise it.