



**International School for Security Forces (EIFORCES)
Research and Documentation Centre (CRD)**

INSIGHTS

No. 14 May 2023

"Will Ukraine Be the 'Death of Pacifism'?"

Introduction

From time immemorial, peace has been an ever-present need. Like security, it is an international public good. But is peace an interval between two wars, or war an interval between two peace processes? Is there any definition of war or peace that does not relate to its opposite? Clearly, peace, one of the most fertile and key concepts of international politics put to the test in times of crisis, is at the heart of reflections as regards the current geopolitical situation in Ukraine. Considered by many analysts to be the most disruptive war Europe has experienced since 1945, apart from the

war in the former Yugoslavia, still known as the "Balkan War" or the "Third Balkan War" (31 March 1991 - 12 November 2001), the war in Ukraine has been shaking world peace for over a year, and raises questions about the action of pacifists committed to bringing it to an end. How have associations working for peace reacted to this international armed conflict? Reflecting on and shedding light on this question means first of all going back to the concept and foundations of pacifism.

I- The need for a conceptual approach and a historical outline of pacifism

Humanity has been haunted by the spectre of war since ancient times. People have praised peace, but they have never stopped killing each other. As a process, peace is never total or permanently achieved, but it is a constantly evolving construct. As a permanent political and moral aspiration, it requires socio-political conditions in order to become a reality. As a cardinal social value, peace is one of the most widely used concepts in international relations and strategy. In practical terms, what does pacifism mean? Exploring the terminology of this concept (1) is crucial to analysing its historical trajectory (2).

1) A brief look at pacifism, a problematic concept.

From the ancient Greek *polemos*, "war", and *logos*, "study", *polemology* is the science of war. It is a branch of international relations that focuses on the analysis of conflicts, their origins and how they work. *Irenology* is the science of peace or the study of security conditions. *Pacifism* refers to the doctrine and actions of peace advocacy opposed to war and violence. It is an altruistic and humanist political movement that champions the search for international

peace and security through negotiation, disarmament, non-violence, ethics and law. Understood as an anti-militarist doctrine that seeks peace among nations or peoples and rejects war, *pacifism*, a synonym for *Wilsonian idealism* or *Wilsonism* (named after the American president Woodrow Wilson, 1856-1924), is opposed to militarism and warmongering. *Pacifism* stems from historical, religious, philosophical and political origins. In essence, it is a governing philosophy of the advocates of peace, non-violence and ecology, and the practice or restoration thereof. The diversity of pacifist currents reveals the polysemic nature of the concept of peace and the complexity of its process. Peace, which is not an easy vocabulary to define, is certainly not the absence of war. It is synonymous with development and social progress.

Being a pacifist therefore means being in favour of peace, opposing violent responses to crises, and therefore, in theory, against war. But does that refer to all wars without distinction? Just as a conflict can be beneficial or constructive ("just war"), *pacifism* can also be perceived in a negative light. But for the pacifist, the conflict must be resolved by

a non-violent response, without any threat of violence.

Basically, a peace movement is any association opposed to war and violence (state or non-state), rejecting the use of weapons and giving priority to safeguarding peace. These movements are based on the Enlightenment thinking of humanists, clerics, moralists, historians and others. Having clarified the semantics of pacifism, it is now important to explore it in greater depth.

2) Pacifism and international relations, from the origins to the present day

In social sciences, a foundation is a set of mechanisms on which a phenomenon is based. Pacifism, which may seem recent, is rooted in the ancient history of international relations. It emerged in Europe after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, under the influence of wars of conquest and ongoing disputes, following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which concluded the Thirty Years' War. It was driven as a social dynamic by anti-militaristic, anti-belligerent and anti-imperialist diplomats, socialists, christians, businessmen and lawyers.

It should be emphasised from the outset that the twentieth century, the century of war, was also the century that saw the development of numerous initiatives in favour of peace. International congresses condemned war and clearly expressed a desire for international harmony and peace. The inventor of dynamite, Alfred Nobel (1833-1896), established in his will the prestigious Peace Prize, awarded for the first time in 1901 to the founder of the Red Cross, Henri Dunant. In 1899 and 1907, peace conferences convened in The Hague on the initiative of Tsar Nicholas II were the crossroads of various inspirations: arbitration, disarmament and the humanisation of war, which led to the Geneva Conventions (1929, 1949). It was against this backdrop that the League of Nations (SDN) was founded in Versailles on 28 June 1919, and after twenty-six years of deadlock was transformed into the United Nations Organisation (UNO) on 26 June 1945 in San Francisco at the end of the Second World War.

During the twentieth century, these movements became institutionalised and internationalised, denouncing colonisation in the process and equating it with capitalism and warmongering. They drew their inspiration from Marxism-

Leninism, developing the concept of imperialism and relying on Lenin's thesis linking war to the expansion of capitalism, which led to the golden age of European colonialism around the world (1890-1914). Faced with the arms race and international rivalries reflected in the Balkan crises that led to the two great World Wars, pacifism was revitalised, emphasising the priority and primacy of human values.

At the end of the First World War in 1918-1920, humanity, battered by four years of bloody and devastating conflict, was driven by the desire for a peaceful world. After the Peace Conferences (Versailles, Saint-Germain, Trianon, Neuilly, Sèvres) of 1919-1920, the peoples and great leaders of the world unanimously hoped for a return to peace and committed themselves to restoring and strengthening a culture of peace, which is a guarantee for stability and security in the world. In the Allied and Entente countries, as well as in the colonies and overseas territories, pacifist and general disarmament sentiments developed, leading to the creation of peace movements crowned by the League of Nations, which was established in June 1919. The UN, which replaced it

in June 1945, is responsible for promoting peace and security through peaceful relations and the rule of law (see the Preamble and Chapter I of the Charter).

Similarly, between 1945 and 1991, the heavy militarisation of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, as part of the East-West rivalry, was denounced by pacifists. They saw nuclear fire, SS-20s, Pershing IIs and cruise missiles as apocalyptic weapons or weapons for the annihilation of humanity. They condemned the perversity of colonisation, and instilled a nationalism that demanded independence for the peoples of Africa and Asia as the final goal. The post-Cold War era, which many had hoped would be peaceful, has been plagued by crises and conflicts, wars of a third kind, amplified by terrorism and violent extremism. Strongly denounced by pacifist movements, these threats, the new beasts of the global jungle since 11 September 2001, are spreading to the countries most plagued by poverty and underdevelopment. Specialists are being forced to rethink the concepts of peace and security to include other variables such as justice, education, the environment and health. Threats have

evolved, and so have strategies. We are now talking more about human, integrated or global security and sustainable peace, to the great detriment of State and military security. The predicted end or decline of conflict after the Cold War was illusory, and the trend towards war continues.

In the meantime, pacifist rhetoric has been adopted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), humanitarian associations and anti-globalisation activists such as José Bové, as well as environmentalists of all stripes who see climate change and other environmental threats, economic disparities and inequalities in global development as real threats to international peace and security. Some prominent pacifist beggars for peace include: Leo Tolstoy, Albert Einstein, Zimmerwald, Mahatma Ghandi, Gaston Bouthoul, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and others.

What emerges from the foregoing is a regularity of pacifist sentiment from its inception to the present day. The existence of pacifist movements, a moral force operating through condemnations, demands and denunciations of exactions, atrocities and crimes of war or against

humanity, does not prevent aggression. War is permanent. This is a constant in international relations, as illustrated by the military confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, which provides a better opportunity to question pacifist initiatives. Basically, the question is whether the positions taken by the various pacifist camps in the Ukrainian cauldron are sounding the death knell for pacifism. Or, more to the point, are the positioning struggles, rivalries and internal warfare among pacifists finally heralding the demise of pacifism?

II- Peace movements put to the test by the Russian-Ukrainian military confrontation: survival or decline?

For over a year now, the military history anthology has been enriched by a new concept: the Russian-Ukrainian war. Behind this confrontation there are many forces at work. To better understand the situation, a review of the underlying, intermediate and immediate causes is all that is needed. Previously, in 2014, the two states were in conflict over Crimea, and Ukraine saw this part of its territory partitioned in favour of Russia. Following the Russian military build-up on the Russia-Ukraine border from late 2021,

the conflict expanded significantly when Russia launched a full-scale offensive against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Now taking a closer look at the role of pacifists on the eve (1) and after the start of the war (2) reveals the following.

1) Pacifist action on the eve of the Ukrainian outbreak: between petitions, denunciations and anti-Belligerent condemnations

Typically, weapons are used when dialogue breaks down, diplomacy fails to act, or when diplomatic channels to resolve disputes are obstructed or exhausted. War is the result of the absence of dialogue or the failure of negotiations. The outbreak of war in Ukraine followed the same pattern. Because of a combination of factors, it came as no surprise to the international players. Before the conflict flared up, civil society, particularly pacifist movements, mobilised to call for restraint, propose alternatives, denounce and condemn the rising dangers. Long before the shock, pacifists made their presence felt by taking a stand against

excessive rearmament and Russian military intervention in Ukraine.

With this in mind, in the early hours of the conflict, the Swiss Peace Movement (SFB), the Coordination Nationale d'Action pour la Paix et la Démocratie (CNAPD), the Justice and Peace Commission, Pax Christi and to some extent the Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP), for example, which had long been opposed to Western economic sanctions against Russia since 2014, renewed their opposition to the use of weapons and proposed peaceful solutions. Voices have been raised to draw attention to the risk of marginalising a major player of Russia's calibre in Europe. For many pacifists, sanctions and ostracism are not an effective means of achieving peace. Both economic constraints and strategic coercion were judged to be incompatible with international law, just as the radicalisation of the Moscow regime was not without consequences for peace.

Thus, despite the opposition of pacifists, militarism and warmongering gained the upper hand, paving the way for war and outrageously undermining peace. However, notwithstanding the outbreak

of the conflict and its bogging down, the defenders of peace did not back down. It is now time to examine the weaknesses that are undermining the action of pacifists in the Ukrainian conflict, not without mortgaging or damaging their image and undermining the cause once defended by the purists.

2) Machinations, volte-face and disunity as the factors underpinning the fragility of pacifist movements in the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Instead of a united front to condemn the clash of arms, pacifists have been indulging in unproductive and shameless factionalism since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine. This situation, instead of a union for strength, change and victory, is not a sign of effectiveness on the part of those who defend peace, nor a guarantee of their future success, given that when a group is fragmented it becomes malleable and weak.

Since the outbreak of hostilities in February 2022, the Ukrainian conflict has been a bloodbath, with tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians killed and maimed, and property damaged. The UN, which is responsible for international

peace and security, has expressed its indignation verbally through its Secretary-General António Guterres. Guterres, who warned of the disastrous consequences for the whole world. Although highly criticised for the powerlessness of its Security Council, the UN is leading efforts to manage the enormous humanitarian crisis resulting from the war and find a path to peace. Pacifists have followed suit, criticising the inaction of Western and Russian politicians, including President Putin. Faced with the reign of martial law, pacifists in Europe, Africa, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland raised their voices to denounce what they saw as "butchery". Even in Russia, placards raised by pacifists in the streets and in Western chanceries are constantly calling for an end to the war.

However, war is still going on, more than a year following its outbreak, and continues to wreak havoc under the helpless eye of international diplomacy. Pacifists are divided. On the one hand, some are calling for total solidarity with Ukraine and therefore for continued military support to defeat Russia and restore the territorial integrity of its adversary. On the other, demonstrators

are calling for negotiations on a basis that would avoid a possible defeat, and therefore a halt to the military headlong rush. The spotlight remains on this "latest conflict", which humanity could have avoided with strategic foresight, as much as on the worrying geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific between China and Taiwan in the China Sea. In many countries, especially in the West, a number of citizens' organisations draw on anti-militarism and pacifist perspectives to question the systematic use of military force in conflicts, oppose military recruitment and the war economy, and call for the consolidation of forms of civilian service. As a result, a major trend of research is currently emerging in many areas of social and political science into the prevention of violent conflict inspired by pacifist ideology.

Despite all the efforts made by pacifists, the war on the ground is in full swing. But pacifists are not giving up. Despite their selfishness, they reaffirm the priority of negotiations, dialogue and diplomacy, and curiously encourage the supply of arms to the belligerents. As well as causing untold suffering to the populations concerned, the consequences of this war are not limited to Ukraine and

Russia. They are spreading beyond the two nations, fuelling alarming increases in costs and creating major food shortages that expose developing countries to a variety of risks. Bernard Adam, a pacifist who founded GRIP in 1979 and served as its president until 2010, hopes that one day the conflict will come to an end, with Ukrainians and Russians meeting around a table.

The international community symbolised by the UN is witnessing the ascendancy of political, geopolitical, strategic and military issues over pacifist considerations. This is undoubtedly nothing new in recent history and in the galaxy of conflicts since the end of the Cold War: pacifist movements may have the wind in their sails, but conflicts are not regressing. Some even speak of a "conspiracy against peace", an internal war among pacifists that benefits the hawks. Strategic and geopolitical analysis is forward-looking, not predictive, still less clairvoyant or prophetic. So if we are to envisage a peaceful outcome to this conflict, we need pacifists who are genuinely pacifist and peaceful. You can win the war without winning the peace. For a peaceful, pacifist or appeased world, conflicts must be resolved in the

long term by looking seriously at their distant and deep-rooted origins and not at intermediate, accessory and illusory causes. This can be done by keeping in mind that it takes fifty years of peace to heal a few years of military victory. Such an exhilarating mission is certainly not that of the warmongers, aggressors and tyrants, rather that of humanists, pilgrims and beggars for peace. One thing is to want peace; another is to work tirelessly to achieve it.

Clearly, history teaches us that most wars end with an enormous human cost and considerable economic and infrastructural damage, but above all with peace treaties or agreements by way of a new order. History also teaches us that, between nations, peace remains a permanent project or challenge.

Conclusion

Will the current war in Ukraine, which started in February 2022, be the death knell of pacifism? Such is the purpose of this Insight Note which, over and above its traditional objectives, draws attention to the militaristic excesses of pacifism.

At the end of this twofold reflection, it must be acknowledged that pacifism, as a

theory and an action of a peaceful and non-violent mind, has undergone changes in the context of the war in Ukraine. From the condemnation of war to the search for peaceful solutions, the original pacifism has been manipulated into fragmentation, division or total disunity. This fruitless split that humanity is witnessing is neither an indicator of the performance or effectiveness of the supposed defenders of peace, nor an asset or guarantee of future success, given that disorder and division are vectors of vulnerability and powerlessness. While neither defeatist nor peremptory, but based on a factual and realistic approach, this Note postulates that the future of pacifism is at stake in Ukraine. Two entirely militaristic tendencies are clashing there. The term pacifism is therefore probably inappropriate to describe those who advocate stepping up military support for Ukraine, in other words continuing the military escalation in favour of arms dealers. This position contributes powerfully to the revival of the military-industrial complex and the ruinous arms race that jeopardises peace.

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