



Continental Thought & Theory
A journal of intellectual freedom

Volume 4 |1: War: Thinking the Unthinkable

<http://dx.doi.org/10.26021/14425> | ISSN: 2463-333X

War Should Not Rule the World.

Consideration Should be Given to What the Conditions for Peace Might Be

Judith Balso

The situation suddenly revealed by Putin's invasion of Ukraine is grave: it is grave in itself, because of its immediate consequences on the human lives and resources of Ukraine and because of all its more general possible consequences on the people of the world. That is why it requires an analysis as scrupulous and well-documented as is possible in a time of war – when propaganda rages and information is limited and partial, if not deliberately false.

Contrary to what is being said, this war is not the first war in Europe since World War II: between 1991 (when Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence) and 2001 (the war in Macedonia), the break-up of the former Yugoslavia resulted in years of wars between neighboring peoples, from which new weaker and often highly unstable State entities have emerged, as currently

evidenced by the new tensions internal to Bosnia-Herzegovina. A total of nearly 140,000 people are believed to have died in these wars.

Armed gangs organized on a nationalistic or religious basis have perpetrated large-scale massacres there, which have been oddly termed "ethnic cleansing." In 1999, NATO intervened militarily, without any UN agreement and without any of its member states being attacked: for 78 days, air strikes targeted Serbia, dropping 23,000 bombs and missiles, allegedly to prevent the Serbian president from carrying out massacres against the Kosovo Albanians – Massacres did take place, after these strikes that didn't prevent anything, and in 2016 the International Criminal Court found that Milosevic bore no responsibility. Kosovo, however, separated from Serbia, has become a NATO military base. Hailed as strikes carried out in the name of a "right of interference" in Europe, these NATO bombings have in fact been the signal for foreign military acts of aggression that everyone is careful not to call "war" and that are presented as pursuing just objectives – in short, "special operations" – as Putin calls the current invasion of Ukraine.

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army is an unacceptable aggression. But it is not this aggression that alone accounts for the upsurge of solidarity, of humanitarian commitment – the flipside of which is a warmongering state of mind – that currently prevails in most European countries, to the point of seeing a dramatic transformation in the relationship with refugees provided they have come as a result of this war. We should be ashamed not for wanting to help the Ukrainian people but for doing nothing for the other ones, who sleep on our streets while serving as a disenfranchised workforce for all the hardest and lowest-paying jobs on which our lives depend. Indeed, we have discovered in these circumstances that there exists – since 2001! – an agreement between European countries allowing them to take in – without their having to go through the rigorous screening of the asylum-seeking process – refugees who can be immediately granted permission to work, to enroll their children in school, and to access existing social rights. This should actually be the procedure applied to all new arrivals, whether those who are driven out of their country by wars to which Europe turns a blind eye because they are not on its doorstep, or those who leave their country for reasons that make their lives just as impossible: hunger, social or family persecution, lack of work, the climate, the acute lack of a future...

The dominant, almost hegemonic, analysis of the war in Ukraine is based on the conviction that we are supposedly in a World War II-type situation, which would therefore require creating a vast war front, aimed at isolating and destroying

an evil Putin, whose regime supposedly embodies the forces of evil against the virtuous European democracies and more broadly "the West." The situation would then be simple and clear: on the one hand, Ukraine, the victim of this aggression because it is a democratic country, endorsing Western values, eager to turn its back on Russia and join the European Union, and, on the other hand, the barbarity and tyranny embodied by a Putin whose army is invading Ukraine in order to occupy and annex it, before proceeding further if it is not stopped, all the while repressing, imprisoning, and liquidating its internal opponents. To make it even more appalling, if need be, the specter of a "communism" that has long since deserted Russia is associated with it.

I for my part will advance a completely different analysis: my hypothesis is that this war reveals that we have entered a World War I-type situation, and if this is indeed the case, the consequences to be drawn from it are quite different.

This war is the result of complex maneuvers, linked to the preparations for a new division of the world. The confrontation that is taking place there is not opposing antagonistic regimes but rival imperial powers that fundamentally belong to the same capitalist world and represent two variants of the globalized capitalism that reigns over the whole world today. What will the new hegemonic capitalist power be? Will it be state capitalism, as in China, or liberal capitalism of which the United States is the paragon – Russia being for the moment in an "in-between" position that actually makes it a weak link. With regards to the latter, NATO is currently pursuing a logic of encirclement by Europe. But if Putin could be overthrown to make way for a strong supporter of the incorporation of Russia into the West – as has happened time and again in the countries of the former Eastern Europe, and it doesn't matter, in this case, if they are very undemocratic or even nationalistic and fascistic forces as in Poland and Hungary – this huge country would become an amazing deployment ground for a liberal capitalism, capable of making available to the United States the raw materials it lacks, which Russia has in abundance.

No one can deny that the United States regards itself as the dominant power and wants to remain so at all costs: how many wars have been fought, blood spilled, countries devastated, for this sole purpose? But since the 1980s, after the death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese leaders have turned their backs on communism and made China the place of a powerful state capitalism, under the leadership of a Party that has kept nothing communist but the name. This country has developed an industrial, commercial, and financial capacity that is

currently greater than that of most countries in the world. It is well known that the United States regards this new power of China as the most serious threat to its dominant position. Can this growing rivalry between the US and China be resolved without a third world war erupting, if the US attempts to thwart China's rise? It's hard to face that. And yet this is the question lurking behind the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and it is impossible, in my opinion, to understand what is happening without this background.

It is a war whose stakes are war: in other words, it is a local war but one whose stakes are the possibility of a generalized war.¹

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How this Hypothesis is Borne out in the Current war in Ukraine

The trigger for this war is the United States' relentless drive to bring Ukraine into NATO and Putin's equally relentless refusal to let that happen. In recent days, this issue has begun to appear in the negotiations and the Ukrainian president's remarks. The newspaper "Le Monde" of March 11, 2022, reporting on the first diplomatic meetings in Turkey, stated that "Zelensky said that he no longer wanted to insist on Ukraine's membership in NATO." But that has long been concealed, or presented as an outright fabrication of Putin's, while since 1991 the United States has been constantly intervening and plotting in Ukraine, in every possible way, to achieve that goal.

NATO – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – is a military alliance between different countries under the exclusive command of the United States. **It is also the military instrument that ensures the United States' domination over the world.** That is why, even as the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist after the collapse of the USSR, NATO, far from dissolving, not only continued to exist but constantly strove to expand, especially in the former Eastern Europe.

NATO now has bases, soldiers, and military equipment, including probably nuclear weapons, in the countries bordering on Russia, such as Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Anyone looking at a map can see that once Ukraine is in NATO, all of Russia's western land borders would be blocked. It would be like a reconstruction of the Wall, but much further east and larger than the one that divided Germany during the Cold War².

As regards Russia, after the USSR broke up in 1991, after its people were humiliated by the introduction of an unbridled capitalism that ruined and destroyed the country's vital forces, Putin's government, even as it governed by repression and state terror, restored its global power, mainly by restoring its military forces, in particular, by restoring its nuclear weapons capabilities. **Russia has now the second-largest nuclear power in the world, after the United States.**

Long Maneuvers and Counter-maneuvers

In 2014, in order to counter NATO's deployment in Ukraine, Putin encouraged and supported the self-proclamation of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, following referendums in the industrial region of Donbass, where there are vast salt and coal mines and a Russian-speaking population more favorable to integration with Russia than with the EU and NATO. It then militarily occupied Crimea, which gives it access to the Black Sea.

With the war between the Ukrainian state and separatist regions continuing, on February 12, 2015 the Minsk (capital of Belarus) Agreements were signed, with the mediation of France and Germany (this is what is called "the Normandy format"): a ceasefire on February 15, 2015, the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the region, the release and exchange of hostages held on both sides, a guarantee of humanitarian access, the withdrawal from Ukraine of all foreign armed formations, and the implementation of a constitutional reform in Ukraine. Today, one of the aims of the aggression against Ukraine is to have the independence of these republics recognized and to confirm the annexation of Crimea to Russia.

Russia is a power that, having lost its satellite countries, is now emerging from its sole hegemony over territories neighboring its borders to expand as an imperial power also in other parts of the world: in Syria, due to the military confrontations between armed gangs in that country; in the Central African Republic, where it has entered into agreements on gold and diamond mines in that country in exchange for "security" provided by the Wagner militias; in Mali, where it is preparing to do the same, negotiating with the government to replace the French army with gangs of the same militia; in Libya, where it shares access to oil resources with Turkey, taking advantage of the collapse of that country brought about by the European and American military interventions that overthrew Gaddafi.

Putin's methods are every bit as bad as those American methods when it comes to overthrowing a government and taking over a territory. In both cases, they are the methods of imperial bandits.

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The United States, for its part, considers itself doubly threatened: by the commercial, financial, and industrial power of China and by the nuclear power of Putin's Russia and its new desire for global expansion. Because, assuming that the United States wants to counter the rise of Chinese power with war, it has everything to fear from a military alliance between China and Russia. To force Ukraine to join NATO, they haven't hesitated to use methods already used by the CIA in the 70s in Chile to overthrow the socialist government of Allende and install the fascist regime of Pinochet. As well as in many other countries in Latin America and the world, including the Venezuela of Chavez and Maduro. In 2005, what was called the "Orange Revolution" (widely supported and financed by the United States and the European powers) resulted in a *"plan for Ukraine's membership in NATO."* NATO then infiltrated senior officers and instructors into the Ukrainian armed forces. The CIA trained, financed and armed neo-Nazi militants, thus creating a paramilitary structure, a militia under its command. In 2014, this militia intervened in Kiev on Maidan Square to turn popular protests against government corruption and unbearable living conditions into an insurrectional battlefield. Their aim was to force President-elect Yanukovich – who had announced that NATO membership was not on his government's agenda – to flee. A "Defense and Security Council" headed by a neo-Nazi, the leader of these paramilitary militias, then carried out brutal persecution of anyone that remained communist in the country (torture and assassinations targeting journalists, union activists attacked and lynched, Russian-speaking inhabitants of eastern Ukraine slaughtered and bombed...). In 2015, these neo-Nazi formations were incorporated into the Ukrainian National Guard, itself trained by hundreds of American instructors.

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Putin's War: Why Now?

In May 2016, the United States broke the treaty prohibiting the installation of an anti-missile shield on European soil and placed in Romania these weapons that can be equipped with nuclear warheads and reach Russian cities. On December 21, 2018, at the UN, the US and the European Union challenged the Intermediate

Nuclear Forces Treaty – meaning that nuclear missiles under NATO command can now be installed in Europe. Russia's representative to the UN said at the time that this was the beginning of a new arms race in its own right.

Finally, since 2008, China and Russia have been proposing a space treaty that would prohibit sending any weapons into outer space, and this treaty has been rejected by the United States.

It is necessary to recall all this because this context explains why Putin may feel threatened and why he started this war now, but also because today Biden presents his country as an innocent lamb and calls on the whole world to come to the aid of invaded Ukraine. While the US is a key player in what is happening and is adding fuel to the fire by spreading the word that countries like Finland or Sweden would also want to join NATO.

Russian aggression against Ukraine is a disaster: Putin is dragging his people into a war that is not only a war of aggression but a fratricidal war, given the very old ties between Russia and Ukraine. As for the rearmament of Russia, which has given it a place on the world stage again, it does not go hand in hand with a development of the country for the benefit of its population, to say the least!

There have already been very courageous protests in Russia against this war, and it is not certain whether the Russian soldiers deployed on Ukrainian soil are not themselves shocked to be fighting against this population. What's more, Putin seems to be considering using mercenaries.

Opposing this aggression does not mean, however, that it would be right to engage in anything that fuels the ongoing war. Sending weapons to Ukraine, massing soldiers and weapons in countries under NATO control – not to mention the absurd proscriptions targeting Russian artists throughout Europe: these are not factors of peace or victory. It only widens the war situation and installs it more firmly day by day.

Today the Ukrainian population is suffering: people leave their homes without knowing if they will ever return, others are living in shelters out of fear of being bombed, more than two million people have already left their country and are seeking refuge in Europe. Families are being separated. Soldiers and civilians are being killed. The country's critical infrastructure is being destroyed by bombing. The poorest populations not only in Europe but throughout the world, including Russia itself, will also suffer because of the disruptions in energy and grain production, due to sanctions that cut Russia off from the rest of the world while causing it to turn

more to China, even though capitalist globalization makes each country dependent on what the others produce.

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Given this Situation, who Benefits from the War Continuing?

The situation in Ukraine is presented to us as that of a population bravely resisting, but it is above all for the time being that of a population left to decisions and forces external to it and that escape it, because these are the decisions and forces of those who have the weapons and the stakes: the Ukrainian government and army under the influence of the American state and NATO, the Russian invading army under Putin's leadership...

This kind of situation is today a situation that is spreading like the plague over the surface of the world. That is why we must think about the capabilities that we need to have in order to be able to hold the difficult position: neither Putin nor NATO. When war threatens to become what could be called the "new world ruler", how can we open a space that rejects this, that blocks it? It is extremely difficult to think it through, it seems to be at the limits of the impossible, and yet this is what we must try to do.

I would like to recall, first, that it is never war itself that puts an end to war – whatever the powers involved – but rather the balance of power that is established in relation to its stakes, and therefore in relation to the conditions for a return to peace. To strive to stop a war is to strive to articulate on what basis peace must be re-established.

This war must be stopped as soon as possible: every day that passes plunges the whole world deeper into the consequences of this war and the risk of its expansion. The most serious thing is that it seems that, on both sides, there may be the criminal temptation to resort to a confrontation involving nuclear power.

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Four points, I believe, can Act in the Direction of Peace.

At the very least it is important to start discussing the terms of a possible peace, instead of getting bogged down in warmongering rhetoric that only serves to perpetuate the state of war and aggravate tensions:

Point 1: As long as NATO does not back down on Ukraine's entry into NATO, Putin will not back down on the war. Currently, each is testing the other. Ukraine must give up joining NATO and declare itself a neutral country, with a status similar to Switzerland's. Its current leader, instead of calling for the expansion of the war with adventurist demands such as the launching of aerial combat between European and Russian aircraft (which is the real content of making Ukrainian skies "a no-fly zone"), should negotiate on that basis, in exchange for an immediate ceasefire and a complete withdrawal of the Russian army from Ukraine.

This point deals with a local element, particular to this war. The following points have a general and longer-term focus.

Point 2: Every situation involving a war must be examined and dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and not as a result of automatic chains of decisions between States. And it is up to the people to decide on their own what should be done, not up to the armies, let alone to an external authority. Quitting NATO is not impossible: that was the Gaullist position in 1966, and the large American forces occupying French soil had to leave. It is to Sarkozy that we owe our reinstatement in that organization. Opposing war decisions of the world's leading power is also not impossible: Chirac/Villepin's speech to the UN opposing the war in Iraq, while not a great feat, was proof of this.

As was the case with the Warsaw Pact, any NATO-type military alliance should be dissolved, because these alliances necessarily lead to war and not to peace. Vietnam, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Palestine, Syria, Libya... These populations continue to suffer heavily.

At this time, **Point 5 of that treaty – which entails the obligation for any country that has signed the treaty to intervene if a NATO country is threatened and attacked – must be repealed:** automatic alliance clauses have always led to disasters – just remember the race to the abyss that set off World War I.

Point 3: Total nuclear disarmament, as well as putting an end to the research that fuels the arms race in the fields of chemical and bacteriological warfare, is a cause that could and should be taken up by all the peoples of the world, against their own governments if need be. When it comes to nuclear matters, several attempts have been made in the past, but they have always come up against the refusal of the

most nuclearized powers to disarm. **Yet in 2017, 122 states signed a *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the UN*.** The countries possessing nuclear weapons – the United States, Russia, France, Great Britain, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea – did not sign the treaty. Nor did the countries that have accepted the installation of nuclear weapons on their soil: Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

At this time, the two previous nuclear treaties that were broken by the United States and the European Union should be reinstated and respected, and the Outer Space Treaty (proposed by Russia and China) signed by all countries.

Point 4: All the countries that don't belong to the small group of great imperial world powers should not be satisfied with not voting, in a situation of war, for one side or the other but instead should act by putting forward positive proposals for peace. On the basis of the proposals set out above, for example, but they could certainly formulate others. Countries such as Austria, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Mexico, Myanmar, New Zealand, Nigeria, Peru, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, and Venezuela – which are signatories to the 2017 Anti-Nuclear Treaty – could take the lead in repeated, protracted actions for peace.

This war suddenly confronts us with a reality of the world long hidden or not taken into account as such. Many people realize – except those who want to close their eyes and go on sleeping – that this is not "one more war" among all those already devastating the world today, nor just a "closer" war. Indeed: it is a war that is giving us a hideous glimpse of what Lenin at the time of World War I had identified with the statement: "Imperialism is war." **In other words: imperial capitalist powers, in their struggle for hegemony, can engage in terrifying wars, capable of destroying whole swathes of humanity and the earth on which it lives.**

I am not an anthropologist, a sociologist, a professor of political science, or an expert on international relations or military issues. My people are the poets and the many young people who have arrived from Africa and Asia, in whose friendship we can put our country back on a path of justice and beauty provided we give up our resentments and our fears. So, it might be objected that I don't have a say as regards this war. I would just like to suggest this: it is precisely war situations that require each of us to seriously study their causes and effects. Because these situations, more than any others, are not subject to the decisions of the people, who are only asked to let themselves be carried off by an ill wind.

Translated by Susan Spitzer



Addendum. One Year After...

One year after this war began, I wouldn't change a single word to what I wrote during its early days. However, at this precise moment in time I wish to emphasize two chief points:

First, the longer this war lasts, the more it becomes clear that its stakes are clearly *war* itself. The initial conflict behind the two great powers is likely to generalize this war into a worldwide war aiming at standing face to face with a new hegemony. Starting to emerge are dramatic signs as to how nations are already weighing up which side will be more beneficial to its own interests: notably, Xi Jinping parading his encounter with Putin in Moscow, and Saudi Arabia's recent alliance with Iran, despite its prior rapprochement with the USA.

Second, and also at stake is the total lack of any definition of what the conditions for peace could be. Echoing German divided opinion, Habermas recently underlined the lack of clarity concerning this question. Here he asked: are we (that is, European people) engaging in this war so that Ukraine can be victorious? Or so that Ukraine is not defeated? And he underlines that victory or non-defeat, the goal is not identical. Regardless, what seems unclear is any alternative to war and moreover, possibilities for peace, especially from Europe and the USA.

Here I would say that the political goals of war are never explicit, neither on the part of the Ukraine government, including Zelensky, who is a long standing OTAN representative (which is by no means a leader of a popular independent resistance), nor on the part of the assailant, especially once it apparent that Putin has failed in what should have been a lightning raid with the clear objective of knocking down the Ukraine government.

The Ukrainian people are facing a terrible situation. They are first prisoners of the assaulting Russian army, now wildly bombing and slaughtering civil places and second, prisoners of Zelensky's politics, whose main task is to assure that the war lasts, not for the safeguard of Ukraine, but rather for destroying the maximum of

human and material forces in Putin's army. If not for Zelensky's mission, the Ukrainian riposte would already have been defeated were there not constant American and European military aid. Moreover, defeat would have been inevitable if it not for the officering of the Ukrainian army by OTAN instructors as well as the international blockade which encircled and thus weakened Russian resources.

It is pertinent to here let us wonder what the political objective for an independent Ukrainian resistance would be.

I call an "independent resistance" which consists of a resistance that would neither capitulate to the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine, nor rally OTAN. This is to admit to the idea that the Ukraine might not exist without there being an OTAN advanced military base against Russia under United States command. If such independence existed it might well be compared to those positions supported by countries calling themselves "non-aligned" countries during the Cold War period. These countries refused to submit to the prescribed choice of the time: to either support the USA leading the "Free World" or support the USSR leading the "Communist Block", to use past vernacular.

Although this position is a difficult one, it is not impossible. If Zelensky was truly concerned about the Ukrainian people and about his country, it is evident that he should have taken such a position from the very beginning. The widely commented upon name "special operation" was coined by Putin to justify his attack. It is important to be reminded of the phrase the French governments used in the fifties when they waged a savage colonial war in Algeria: "*Opération de maintien de l'ordre*" [Operation for saving public order]! Implicit with the lexicon of both Putin and French-Algerian wars, one can't miss 'hearing' the colonial and despising 'visions' regarding the assaulting country. But such terms of war (justification) also reveal that governments are not always able to admit to their own populations the fact that a *true* war is taking place. It stands to reason that any government engaged in this kind of attack is aware that sooner or later it will be held accountable, especially since youth will be enlisted to fight as well as endure a myriad of flesh and psychic wounds all in the name of killing others and to inevitably be killed. Putin had already employed several expedients to galvanize ongoing human forces for an already long-lasting war. This included the freeing of incarcerated people as well as the employment of mercenaries, indicating that support for Russian is not so widespread, or its conviction internationally justified. Of late we are also witnessing media images of young Ukrainian people trying to board their forced incorporation to

Ukrainian military fights. Any Ukrainian independent resistance might resonate with such feelings of despair.

But if in the Ukraine no position appears to express the dual refusal of Putin's annexation as well as any type of incorporation of OTAN's disposal, then there is no chance that this war will end without leading to an even greater disaster.

It is imperative that one should freely examine the situation without being influenced by the two fighting blocks, both of which while dissymmetric in military forces are similar in their present war goals.

Judith Balso – April 10, 2023

Notes

¹ There are two major differences, however, with the situation of 1914, but they do not negate the hypothesis, on the contrary: at the end of this first war the colonial division of the world took place: France and Great Britain divided and plundered for their own benefit Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, leaving Germany and its allies out of this division, while the United States, through its intervention in Europe, laid the foundations of its own power. Today, how can what newspapers like to call "a new world order" take place, if not through a violent redistribution of areas of influence and territories? During the First World War, the armies that clashed in Europe were armies made up of what was called "the draft," that is, young men taken en masse from the population of each country and forced to participate in the war for the sake of the country's defense. Soldiers were recruited even from the colonies to come and fight in that war... whose only purpose was the maintenance and expansion of colonial empires. Hence the scale of the slaughter, millions dead, which literally bled dry the male youth of the early 20th century. Today, Western armies have almost everywhere become professional armies, if not mercenary armies. We shouldn't assume that this would reduce the number of casualties. For one thing, the war in Ukraine shows that the government is forced to arm its population, to form militias from scratch with people who know nothing about war and the handling of weapons – which creates a situation of anarchy where the civilian population is very vulnerable. And for another, every war aims to destroy both the human and material resources of the enemy, so that, if two armies aren't opposed in the confrontation, then it is the civilian populations who are themselves necessarily targeted and killed in the fighting. Hence the importance of taking action against militarization in all its forms (conventional, nuclear, bacteriological, biological, etc.).

² Between 1945, the end of World War II, and 1991, the collapse of Soviet Russia, the period called "the Cold War" was based on a very different situation from the current world situation. The world was divided into two large blocs: on the one hand the Western bloc, which called itself "the free world", and on the other the "communist" bloc, composed of the socialist states of Eastern Europe (which appeared in the course of the war), the USSR, Maoist China, North Korea, North Vietnam and various Third World countries. The creation of NATO in 1949 laid the foundation for a vast Western military alliance under US command. Faced with NATO, some of the Communist bloc countries had formed their own military alliance: the Warsaw Pact.

