A road to peace – how and why do wars end?

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Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine quickly added a new item to the agenda of social debate. It is a question that has featured unfortunately often in human history: how do we end the war and restore peace?

In this short article I reflect on what previous sociological and humanistic studies into war and peace – and especially the endings of wars and post-war solutions – tell us about the processes, forms and opportunities of restoring peace. Is there something that we could learn from past experiences now that even a ceasefire comes with myriad conditions according to the political talk of the warring leaders and their supporters?

Violent societal conflicts and crises are studied in many disciplines. Political science, historical sociology, historical research, comparative legal history and peace research in their different forms are the most natural but certainly not the only platforms for exploring these themes.[1] Despite the immense scope of the research, I try to focus on the most relevant observations and perspectives. My sources only represent a fraction of the body of scientific literature. I nevertheless believe that it is sufficiently comprehensive and relevant to at least begin an analysis and get to the core of the issues, even if it is not possible to go into great detail in such a short piece of writing.[2]

One traditional core area of research into wars and other conflicts are the underlying reasons. What factors lead to wars between countries, civil wars and other serious violent uprisings? This kind of emphasis is natural and in many ways well justified. Analysing the reasons for phenomena is also essential, if our goal is to prevent wars and other conflicts in the future. Understanding the underlying reasons can show us the way to avoiding the repetition of earlier 'mistakes'. Naturally, however, this does not automatically lead to certain kinds of politics. Realistically speaking, political actors pick and choose from the research those results that legitimise their own positions.

[1] I will not dwell on military science, which does not fall in my expertise and which primarily deals with military strategy, weaponry and battles.

[2] Somewhat similarly to what I am doing now, my previous articles have echoed the views of sociologist *Risto Alapuro* on the preconditions for revolutions and violent social protests. See Risto Alapuro: State and Revolution in Finland. University of California Press, 1988.

Although studying reasons from different perspectives may sound like a clear and simple recommendation and a straightforward objective, the phenomena involved are complex and often fast-changing. The phenomena are difficult to grasp.

The scientific community is also divided on the phenomena, which has led to the creation of several opposing schools of thought that interpret the reasons and consequences of conflicts differently – also connected in their personal values or even ideologies.[3]

It is important to emphasise that the complexity of processes that lead to wars is often so great that finding consensus on the reasons behind the phenomena is exceptionally difficult if not impossible. There is always uncertainty. The debate about the reasons and phenomena associated with war also often has elements of conscious propaganda and even historical falsification, on both national and international levels. This trend has been rising in recent years, as populist rhetoric has increased in social discourse.

Science always reflects the spirit of the time, and the shifting focus in crisis and conflict research is especially strongly linked to changes in global and regional political architecture. What may have been difficult to study before can become a popular topic or a fashionable approach thanks to these changes.[4] Without delving into a systematic analysis, there is at least one clear change or new focus area that has emerged in this field of research.

The various phenomena related to restoring peace and the cultural effects of war have been at the forefront of research since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and in the context of the many recent transitions from dictatorship to democracy. The change in the political architecture has quickly permeated the themes, priorities and perspectives of historical and social science. In respect of the study of conflicts, the following kinds of questions have become increasingly popular:

How do wars end and what are the underlying factors? What are the short-term and long-term (cultural) effects of crises? How can stable social development be ensured in the short term and in the long term in these kinds of situations?

It is important to note that the aftermath of a war between nations can be very different from the aftermath of a civil war; in the case of the former, the enemy is another country, while the latter is about a population of a state splitting into competing factions. The difference is not always clear-cut, however, as it is relatively common for outsiders to also get involved in civil wars. Moreover, the reasons that lead two nations to war can stem from internal conflicts.[5] The boundary between domestic and foreign policy has often been described as a 'line drawn on water'.

One good historical example comes from tsarist Russia. In 1904, *Nicholas II* launched an attack to Japan in order to take attention away from the huge internal problems of the Russian Empire – problems that also led to the end of oppression in Finland and gave us a chance to

[3] Each school also emphasises different topics and perspectives. Some study (raw) reality and facts while others focus on narratives that illustrate or reflect reality or legitimise events. On different schools of thought, see Jukka Kekkonen: Mitä on kontekstuaalinen oikeushistoria? [What is contextual legal history?] Forum Iuris, 2013 and Heikki Ylikangas: Mitä on historia ja millaista sen tutkiminen [What is history and what does historical research entail]. Art House, 2015.

[4] It can be said that each era writes its own history. One extremely important fact is that genuine, systematically truth-seeking research is only possible in (sufficiently) democratic countries.

[5] Civil wars have traditionally – and quite rightfully – been said to be the cruellest of all wars. Most of my sources emphasise this fact.

form a democratic parliament (1906). It would be highly justified to ask how much of Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 was influenced by similar reasons related to the preservation of a dictatorial system of government. Demands for democratic expansion have always been terrifying for dictators.

It is also worth noting that there has been a significant shift in wars on a global scale since the Second World War: the number of wars between nations has decreased while the number of civil wars has increased. In some cases, serious conflicts have continued in one form or another for decades. They have all eventually ended, however, and this will certainly be the case in the future as well.

The issues that have been raised are extremely difficult and multifaceted, and they often involve major international phenomena. A comparative perspective is essential for overcoming these problems.

The importance of a new approach and the timeliness of fresh perspectives are well demonstrated by the war in Ukraine. How could peace realistically be achieved, and could historical studies contribute to solutions? It is evident that there is no simple ready-made solution, especially not in the short term. In the longer term, a shift to more peaceful politics in Russia cannot be achieved without genuine democratisation of the country's political regime.[6]

When examining the possibilities of peace, it is important to make a distinction between normative and factual perspectives: what should be done and what can be done in the light of research or in reality. Unfortunately wishes and reality rarely meet. It is also always important to remember whose wishes are at issue. My perspective is anchored on the values of a democratic state based on rule of law, which are enshrined in the constitution of Western liberal democracies as well as the treaties establishing the European Union and the human rights charters of the UN.

Before an analysis of the current situation, I wish to briefly summarise a few perspectives and scientific facts gleaned from history and new research in this field. I have also personally explored the problems that the aftermaths of civil wars – namely the Spanish and Finnish civil wars – have posed in the context of societal and legal policy.[7]

One undisputed classic of essays about the pursuit of peace is *Immanuel Kant*'s 'Perpetual Peace' from 1795, which was published in the midst of the French Revolution. The essay is written in the form of a peace treaty. It includes both 'preliminary' and 'definitive' conditions for achieving and maintaining peace. Many of them sound surprisingly modern.

The fifth Preliminary Article, for example, provides that 'no state shall by force interfere with the constitution or government of another state'. Kant also proposes to abolish standing armies and ban states from contracting national debt for foreign policy (war) purposes. According to Kant, the correct form of government for ensuring peace is republican, and the law of nations should be founded on a federation of free states.

Although the essay attracted widespread attention and was translated into multiple languages when it first came out, its popularity – and relevance – grew to new heights when the questions of war and peace began to gain momentum in international politics. This occurred

[6] See Mikhail Shishkin: War or Peace. Russia and the West. An Approach. WSOY, 2019.

[7] See Jukka Kekkonen: Kun aseet puhuvat. Poliittinen väkivalta Espanjan ja Suomen sisällissodissa [When weapons talk. Political violence in Spanish and Finnish civil wars]. Art House, 2016.

in the late 19th and early 20th century, when the legal rules of war were drafted in connection with international peace conferences.[8]

There are three books from the era after the so-called 'end of history'[9] that have particularly inspired me. The first is called 'Stopping the Killing' (1993), and it was edited by political scientist *Roy Licklider* and explores the post-civil war experiences of numerous countries around the world. The book contains comparative analyses – and can be used to draw comparisons – of the success of peace treaties and other ways to end wars. According to the book, history proves that even the longest and bloodiest civil wars ultimately come to an end.[10]

The case studies featured in the book highlight five factors that are especially significant after the end of a war. The first relates to the reasons that led to the war and the nature of the war, such as whether the objective was liberation or revolution. Conflicts tend to be particularly difficult to resolve when they involve issues of identity (race, ethnicity, nationalism). Economic and political disputes that do not feature these elements are easier to overcome.[11]

The second hurdle is the forming of coalitions after the war. The two sides must be able to work together, in one way or another. The third factor that affects post-war negotiations is each side's success in the war and their military capacity. The fourth factor that influences the post-war situation are the interests of third parties (whether or not they were involved in the war). The fifth is the sustainability of the peace treaty or other agreement that brought the war to an end, which in turn is heavily influenced by the terms that the stronger or winning side is prepared to offer to the loser.[12]

Further insights and new perspectives on the problems that have emerged after the end of (world) wars can be gleaned from a book called 'War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War' (2013), which is a collection of articles written mostly by historical researchers, edited by *Robert Gerwarth* and *John Horne*, as well as from *Keith Lowe*'s study 'Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II'. [13] The following citation is from the introduction of the first of the aforementioned books, written by the editors:

> 'The end of the Great War did not immediately bring peace to Europe. On the contrary, revolutions, counter-revolutions, ethnic strife, pogroms, wars of independence, civil conflict and inter-state violence continued from 1917 to 1923 as the seismic forces unleashed by the cataclysm of the Great War transformed the political landscape of much of the old continent. -- Paramilitarism

[8] See Martti Koskenniemi: The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

[9] The concept, which has been widely used since its inception, was coined by *Francis Fukuyama*, whose book 'The End of History and the Last Man' (1992) became and is still a cause of much debate on the triumph and future of democracy.

[10] See Roy Licklider: Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End? New York University Press, 1993. The book focuses on civil wars, which are often particularly brutal and after which it is even more challenging to build peace and harmony than after wars between nations. It should be noted, however, that drawing a line between wars and civil wars is difficult and that two different kinds of war can also occur at different stages of the same conflict.

[11] Licklider, 1993, pp. 14–15.

[12] Licklider, 1993, pp. 15–17.

[13] See Robert Gerwarth – John Horne (eds): War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War. Osuuskunta Vastapaino, Tampere, 2013; Keith Lowe: Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II. Viking, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2012.

> was a prominent feature in all of these conflicts and this book seeks to explore the origins, manifestations and legacies of this form of political violence as it emerged between 1917 and 1923.'[14]

At the heart of the book is the political violence that emerged in the aftermath of the First World War across Europe. The articles feature a wide range of extremely insightful and sometimes conflicting examples of phenomena that came about as a result of the war and the culture of violence that was fuelled and maintained by frustrated soldiers returning from the war. The differences between the experiences of the winners and the losers, the large and small countries and Western and Eastern Europe are a good starting point for a comparative analysis of the many problems associated with preserving democracy.

Lowe's study paints a vivid picture of the chaos, violence, civil wars and even anarchy that characterised Europe in the years following the Second World War. He writes about the 'Zero Hour' when many states had to rebuild their fundamental social institutions, basic infrastructure and legitimacy.

My third source of inspiration are comparative studies on democratic transitions, among which one of the best known is 'Transitional Justice' (2000) by legal scholar *Ruti G Teitel*. The book explores, systematises and comparatively analyses different kinds of democratic transitions and problems that have emerged in connection with such transitions around the world.

Although there is no single universal truth to take away from past transitions, Teitel believes that the chances of success are the greatest with a so-called 'golden middle way' approach, which addresses the wrongs of the previous system but also leaves room for mercy and leniency. This approach also respects the principles of the rule of law.[15]

My ultimate question is whether there is something that we can learn from the aforementioned works that could help to create opportunities in post-war Ukraine. Firstly, it is important to remember that every solution has its unique context, which stems not only from the power dynamics between the two sides and the countries' internal struggles but also from global politics.

The first step is to end the war – somehow. There is no going forward otherwise. One way to end a war is for the winners (and their allies) to stipulate the terms of peace and the content of the losers' societal policy. This can happen if the power dynamics are asymmetrical and this situation leads to what is called a 'forced peace'. If the peace treaty is totally unfair and unreasonable to one side, it can even sow the first seeds of a new conflict. The Treaty of Versailles that was signed after the First World War (1919) is considered to be an example of this.[16]

All agreements by definition have at least two sides, and their objective is to agree on the steps that should be taken towards the future. The politics of Finland after the Finnish Civil

[14] Gerwarth – Horne, 2013, p. 15.

[15] See Ruti G Teitel: Transitional Justice. Oxford University Press, 2000. See also Jukka Kekkonen: 'Menneisyyden hallinta oikeudellisena ja poliittisena kysymyksenä' ['Control over the past as a legal and political question'] in Kimmo Nuotio – Jukka-Pekka Takala (eds): Ymmärtäminen ja oikeudellinen vastuu [Understanding and legal accountability]. Edita, 1997, pp. 129–137.

[16] The Treaty was extremely harsh on the losers. However, the winners also had trouble finding common ground to their opinions.

War are an internationally recognised example of how severe repression can quickly be replaced by social integration.[17]

Only a handful of European countries (for example France, the UK and Sweden) were able to preserve their democratic regimes during the inter-war period, which was marked by several subtle and less subtle transitions away from democracy and towards dictatorship.[18] Finland kept its democracy, even though the democratic system came under serious threats and also grew narrower with the exclusion of the extreme left from the democratic process.[19]

Sustainable peace cannot be achieved without a degree of compromise and solutions that ensure fairness. The sustainability of these solutions also depends on how society and the global situation evolve.

Before the lessons and experiences of history can be applied and tested, however, we must find a way to silence the guns.

[17] See Jukka Kekkonen: 'K J Ståhlberg: Epävakaiden aikojen vahva johtaja' ['K J Ståhlberg: A strong leader in times of uncertainty'] in Seppo Tiihonen – Maritta Pohls – Juha Korppi-Tommola (eds): Presidentti johtaa. Suomalaisen valtiojohtamisen pitkä linja [Presidential leadership. Finland's systematic approach to government]. Siltala, 2013, pp. 35–53; and Kekkonen, 2016, pp. 167–174.

[18] The most extreme examples are naturally Germany under Hitler and the Soviet Union under Stalin. These countries were united in their open scorn of democracy and the rule of law. See Kekkonen, 2013, pp. 141–144.

[19] See Juha Siltala: Lapuan liike ja kyyditykset [Lapua Movement and kidnappings]. Otava, 1985; and Heikki Ylikangas: Käännekohdat Suomen historiassa [Turning points in Finnish history]. WSOY, 1986.