

Use people power to outlaw war, too
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CHANGING MINDSETS: World community must rally to make war a crime

FOR the past few years, the Perdana Global Peace Foundation has been trying to convince people that war is a crime; that war should be criminalised.

If one thinks deeply enough, one must conclude that war is indeed a crime. We all, the whole human race, regard the killing of a person by another as a crime; a crime so serious as to warrant the stiffest punishment, including the death penalty.

Yet, in war, a person may order the killing of a million people, and it is not regarded as criminal. Indeed, the man who ordered the killings is often regarded as a great man, a hero.

And the killers, too, the soldiers, are regarded as heroes, awarded medals and multicoloured ribbons to wear proudly on their breasts on ceremonial occasions.

There is something wrong here. How can we regard the killer of one man as a murderer but the killer or killers of millions as heroes? The pilot of the Enola Gay, which bombed Hiroshima killing 100,000 people, is a free man, regretting nothing regarding the horrors he inflicted on innocent men, women and children, the healthy and the sick.

Wars have been fought for thousands of years. Does that make wars normal and acceptable? Think of slavery. Slavery, too, was regarded as acceptable and normal for millennia. But for most countries, slavery has been abolished. It has been abolished because it represents oppression by men on other men. That is not right and so it is made illegal; made a crime.

Slavery is certainly not as bad as murder, as the killing of men by men. Yet, slavery was considered bad enough for the human race to abolish it, to inflict severe penalties on whoever practises slavery.

Clearly, what was acceptable as normal in the past does not necessarily justify continued acceptance today and in the future. As the human community becomes more civilised, the practices of the past have been scrutinised and re-evaluated and many have been condemned as incompatible with the values of a more sophisticated and more sensitive modern human society.

So, is it so strange or unusual for modern society, conscious of the horrors of war and the massive killings involved to reject war, to criminalise it the way it was done with slavery?

Perhaps many of us are not aware of the horrors of war as we should. Let us take a closer look at war. War is about killing people, usually on a massive scale. In war, ordinary men willingly kill. In war, men behave like wild animals. No, men in war behave worse than animals.

Animals kill for food and animals don't kill their own kind, even the wildest of them. But men kill merely for the sake of killing. Men kill their own kind. And he does this with inhuman beastliness.

Men are trained to kill, and are equipped with ever more lethal killing instruments. Such is the training in modern wars that special commandos willingly creep up to the unsuspecting enemy to slit his throat with a knife. And often, they train their guns on innocent civilians and with a burst of their automatic weapons, kill these people who had done them no harm.

In the current war, the usually young soldiers would mutilate bodies, decapitating and hacking off the limbs, kicking dead bodies with total disrespect.

In Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, men and women from a great civilisation strip prisoners naked, force them to self abuse, threaten them with dogs, tie ropes round their necks and drag them on the floor, subject them to electric shocks to their genitals, pour water on towels covering their faces so that they inhale water when they breathe and feel as if they are drowning and many, many more hideous acts unworthy of modern civilisation.

The worst part is that the very civilised leaders of a great nation actually legalised the forms of torture meted out to detainees, many of whom were released after years of detention without any explanation as to why they were detained. Presumably, they were found to be innocent of the acts they were suspected of committing.

In today's wars, the whole country becomes the battlefield. Bombs are dropped and missiles fired at villages, towns and cities, killing innocent non-combatants of all ages, razing to the ground buildings and houses, schools and hospitals and destroying electric cables and wires, and water pipes. Life support equipment in hospitals suddenly stops, killing the patients.

The destructiveness of the last great war deterred the powerful nations from going to war against each other. And so they pick on weak countries to invade, to kill and destroy.

The leaders of these powerful nations are not ashamed to tell lies in order to justify their invasions and killings. When their lies were exposed, their people still re-elected them. This makes their people equally culpable.

Research and development of ever more destructive weapons take up much of the powerful countries' budget. Gleefully, they report on the destructiveness of their new weapons. They are forever seeking opportunities to test them in real life. For this, they instigate proxy wars or they find excuses for going to war. It is suspected that the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Centre was engineered to provide an excuse for war.

Their latest creations are the unmanned aerial vehicles, tanks and warships. With these weapons, their fighters would be safely ensconced a thousand miles from the target zones and the people they wish to destroy and kill. They, the killers, would run no risk of being injured. They can kill a hundred thousand people while drinking beer in the air-conditioned operations rooms.

They will not see the destruction, the deaths and the horrors they have caused. They will sleep well and soundly after committing mass murders.

The big military powers of today are nothing more than international bullies, picking on countries unable to match their military capacities, applying sanctions to starve and weaken their puny target countries and then launching "shock and awe" invasions. The

killings and massive destructions are intended to impress and frighten their adversaries into capitulation.

Yes, wars of today are massively destructive, with an unlimited toll in deaths. No one is spared. The people in the target countries are truly terrorised, waiting to have their heads torn from their bodies, their arms and legs blown off and their remains eaten by the ownerless hungry and wild dogs.

One would expect that the great advocates of human rights, the people who loudly proclaim the freedoms of democracy, to be foremost in wanting wars to be made illegal. But, alas, these are the very people who resort to war at the drop of a coin.

Even as they talk of the sanctity of human life, of freedom from oppression, they would not hesitate to indulge in massive bombings and rocketings, killing hundreds of thousands, laying waste whole cities, towns and villages, detaining without trial and torturing their victims for years and years.

These hypocritical powers will continue to resort to wars for as long as human society considers war as proper and legitimate.

Maybe even if we make war a crime, the big powers would not care; would still wage war against other nations. But public opinion is a powerful force. Just as slavery ceased to be practised because public opinion was against it, war, too, can be outlawed if people, ordinary people, object to the mass murders and destruction due to wars.

Changing mindsets and value systems takes time. But it is not impossible. Already, many of the cruelties and injustices of the past have been abolished. In fact, even the death penalty has been abolished in many so-called humane countries of the world.

If the campaign to make war a crime is carried out assiduously and persistently, the day will come when war as an option to settle conflicts between nations would be rejected and classified as a crime. Then, we can say that our civilisation is truly a civilisation.

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