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WHAT IS THE
PURPOSE OF WAR

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COSTS OF WAR

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OTHER ISSUES

Preparing for Peace Initiative - The process of the enquiry and its results

Date:

The challenge we gave ourselves & in pursuit of which we came to feel we were led by the Spirit, was to search for an idea which might take us beyond the solid centre of traditional Quaker belief - which condemns all "bloody principles & practiceswith all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever".

Moral certainties underlie our testimonies. Yet after three & a half centuries of Quaker witness to a global population of (now) + 6 billion human beings, only a few hundreds of thousands of humans utterly reject war as a moral means for settling disputes between or within nation states. However reluctantly the majority of humans seem willing to kill each other for this or that cause when called upon by their elected leaders, or ordered so to do by despots. When, during our search for truth, the Iraq war threw up some 58% of people world-wide who said "no" to that war, we felt that here was an important straw in the wind.

Two key insights emerged. First, that individual Friends ought to be more active in thinking things out for themselves & then, crucially, doing something about what we have discovered - without reliance on Friends House, or standing committees, or other foci within Quakerism. Individual Friends on the PM bench have exactly the same responsibility for the "truth" as do those seasoned Friends who accept positions of organisational responsibility.

Secondly, we came to perceive that if "pacifism" per se was a fundamental consequence of our belief system, then we needed to articulate a parallel range of ideas, visions, commitments & insights, so as to persuade the majority of people of the wisdom of our testimony.

Two further insights which emerged as we entered the 21st century, gave grounds for exploratory hope. On the one side were the factual & terrifying advances made through applied science to what our grandparents had called, "the engine of war".

Applied technology has rendered war catastrophic in terms of its full potential for planned or unintended disaster. I do not need to analyse for Friends the universal threat posed by nuclear, biological or chemical warfare, or the equally threatening refinements to so called "smart weapons" applied to the manufacture and delivery of weapons of mass destruction - not only over the entire surface of our globe, but into outer space, our last frontier - which is destined to be breached this year. Nor do I need to point to science based methods of torture practised even within democracies, or to the encroachment of war centred policies in the private life of the citizen, including the child in arms, or to the parallel loss of civil liberties often pioneered by our Quaker forebears - but jettisoned as war encroaches on daily life, or - for the first time in human history - the impact such threats have even on unborn generations.

Modern war, based on science & technology, we concluded, is entirely different to anything ever before experienced by human kind.

But then at the start of our new century a second fact emerged - the socio-economic phenomenon we call "globalisation". International social & economic structures, evolving in global terms, force us to live in one world as they beat back the frontiers of nation state boundaries - so often in the recent past the cause of, or the excuse for, war.

We came to understand that the pressure generated by these two modern trends (the "engine of war" & "globalisation") could force the idea of non-violence to the top of the peoples' agenda because they make the cultural phenomenon of war in the 21st century, ultra vires, redundant, obsolete, unwise, futile and self defeating.

This was the simple idea at the heart of our concern, however complex might be its application.

The process was one of discovery, but also of joy within our group, of friendship, of some excitement - but increasingly of deepening spirituality. Other Friends shared in this. We also experienced many frustrations, some critical disagreements, & a re-assessment of our personal commitment to Quaker peace testimonies. The distinction between what Albert Einstein defined as "convinced pacifism" towards which he lent, & "absolute pacifism" which some Friends feel able to proclaim despite our world's complexity, was, nonetheless, impossible or impractical, to other Friends.

We retained our conviction that if non Friends could quietly come to see the wisdom & logic of the position we had exposed, then our joint future would be, to that degree, more attractive. War, symmetrical or non-symmetrical, might yet be confined to the dust-bin of history even as slavery, using women as chattel, the exploitation of child labour, the practise of capital punishment, the centrality of "revenge" in the cultural mores of many communities, or other serious flaws in civil society, have been discarded if not entirely eliminated.

Thus we were led to devise four key questions & to invite recognised experts, principally non Quakers & non-pacifists, to speak to them, & then to posit the cultural & political consequences towards which their answers pointed

First, "can modern war confidently achieve its objects?" Secondly, "can modern war be controlled, contained or managed in any meaningful way?" Thirdly, "What really are the critical economic, human, & environmental costs of modern war? Is modern war sustainable in such terms? This sub-set included an analysis of the attempt in 1984, later adopted by UNESCO on behalf of the UN, entitled, "The Seville Statement". It explains through science why people go to war in order to kill each other. Importantly, Seville tells us that war is a cultural phenomenon; it is not built into our genes; it is never "inevitable". People need to know that with conviction. Finally, we asked - what, then, ought 21st century humans to do with modern war, its threat & increasing obsolescence?

We persuaded 25 contributors to help us, over a five year period. They included two Friends, one Muslim cleric, the former

Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, a former UK Ambassador to the UN, the first High Court Judge & President of the International Criminal Court, The Sec. Gen. of the Council of the European Union, two chairs of "Pugwash" one of whom was a Nobel Laureate, one military General, the Professor of the Bradford School of Peace Studies & ten eminent academics of professorial rank – mostly British, but including American, South African, Indian, Israeli & Korean scholars.

In a few minutes we can only itemise critical points of interest.

First, there seemed to be a consensus amongst historians that as war & civil society become more complex & inter-linked, it is increasingly difficult for war to generate positive results, or which do not trigger off unintended effects. Sometimes, as in Sierra Leone, a measure of "success" seems a reasonable outcome – but always at an unacceptable cost to human life. Overwhelmingly as Vietnam, the West bank, Iraq twice over, Rwanda, Angola, Chechnya, Northern Ireland, Cambodia, the Sudan, Columbia, Afghanistan & so on demonstrate, war aims are rarely secured. Because of the complexity of modern war, not only in its political objects but as a consequence of the unpredictability of its diverse elements, including serendipity - soldiers & their political masters are pushed this way & that, as a consequence of which "management" per se is simply not feasible. The best of plans too often "gang aft aglay".

It follows that if modern war increasingly is a failed tool, it is unlikely to secure its declared aims with precision. "Smart" weapons go adrift; civilian populations do not behave as predicted; unexpected consequences flow from the most carefully planned of actions. A computer virus can be more destructive today than an atomic bomb. Sometimes the top human element in the military &/or the civil order is unpredictable. Human artefacts or constructs in modern war break down or fail to work. Climate or terrain does not always function as predicted. Nor does morale within either the military or the civilian populations. Back home the civilian population, especially in democracies, may resist the war effort in a way which makes life uncomfortable for civil or military leaders.

Meanwhile, as in South Africa, Georgia, the Ukraine & more recently the Lebanon, the civilian population pushes the military out, non-violently. We glimpse the green shoots of what might be. Encouragingly, the steady evolution of international humanitarian law puts political & military leaders at risk of prosecution, impeachment, or trial. Differing authorities – the government, the European Union or NATO, the UN or its specialised agencies, the rules of war, the International Court & so on - add complexity to complexity.

When we analyse the answers to our third question as to the human, economic & environmental costs of modern war, I can only high-light a fraction of what we discovered. Points which struck me as important include:

- a. Civilians are ten times more at risk in modern war than soldiers. Since 1945 84% of all war casualties, in fact, have been civilian. We kill one another at a rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ million persons per annum. Is it not reasonable to assume that when civilians take this on board they are likely to hammer a large nail into the coffin called "war"?
- b. In the Vietnam War 58,000 American soldiers were killed but so were an estimated 4 million Vietnamese. In Rwanda an estimated $\frac{3}{4}$ million people were killed, over 2 million fled as refugees, & a further 1 million were displaced in their own country. In the West Bank over 500 children have been slaughtered. Meanwhile, the number of civilian deaths in Iraq has been withheld. Why?
- c. The traditional doctrinal justification for war, & with which many leaders ease their consciences, no longer holds up because clauses six & seven concerning "proportionality" & "non-combatant immunity", inevitably fall under the conditions of modern warfare.
- d. The evolution of International Humanitarian Law threatens military & civil leaders on all sides, alike.
- e. Economically taxes were first introduced to pay for war. Today British taxpayers subsidise the arms trade to the tune of £240 millions annually. So far in Iraq we have spent + £3.5 billions. Our two latest aircraft carriers will

cost +£2 billions. Their Joint Strike Fighters – the Typhoons – first designed in the now long distance Cold War, cost £20 billions. Isn't that nonsense, twice over?

- f. Environmentally, the costs of modern war can be astronomic & the consequences of its unintended but nonetheless real contribution, for example, to global warming - think of those burning oil wells in Iraq - are substantial. Pre-1979 the military scattered 87 million land mines across tiny Cambodia - ensuring deaths & crippling injuries to its civilian population, & the destruction of its ancient & intricate water system, for decades to come. Forests are destroyed, water reserves are polluted, homes, villages, towns & even cities like Falluja with its dense civilian population, are obliterated, & so on & so forth.
- g. One of our most perceptive papers was given by Dr. Chris Williams on the nature of civil society during war. He reminded us that it is the politician who decides on war, & not the people.

The point, Friends, is that modern war is an exercise in futility. The limited utility of armed force & the inherent danger of relying on such force in the 21st century are self evident. For two centuries, war - time & again - has proven to be all but ungovernable. That is an historical fact. War does not work because it cannot work & the sooner we get rid of it the better. Acting catalytically Friends can argue within society with confidence. We can witness to the self-evident truth that modern war is now obsolete.

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