

War Emerging Increasingly as Existential Threat

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War has always been a source of immense human distress. What is more important to point out is that its capacity to cause distress and destruction has been increasing in very dangerous ways.

The World Report on Violence and Health, published by the WHO, has provided the following information on deaths caused by war and conflict during the last five centuries—

- 16th century—1.6 million
- 17th century—6.1 million
- 18th century—7.0 million
- 19th century—19.4 million
- 20th century—109.7 million

Of course population has also been increasing but the almost six-fold increase from the 19th to the 20th century is deeply disturbing. This figure indicates that over a million perished per year on average during the 20th century in wars and conflicts. What is more, this figure may not include all of the mortality caused by many indirect impacts of wars and conflicts.

As the Brown University's estimates for the 'War on Terror' of the 21st century have made clear, if indirect impacts of war are included then mortality can be many times more than the deaths caused directly by war and conflict.

These estimates have stated that the 'war on terror' claimed about 0.9 million lives directly, but if indirectly caused mortality is included then this figure rises much more menacingly to

4.5 million. In other words, in this context, indirectly caused deaths are about four times the directly caused deaths. This figure does not include all the countries ravaged by the war on terror, and needs updating too.

This is a reminder that the enormous death toll of the 20th century is being maintained in the 21st century, more or less, if we add up the mortality of all the dozens of wars and conflicts of the world during the first 23 years of the 21st century.

What is more disturbing is that talk of the possibility of the third world war and a nuclear war has been heard more during the last two years than in the several decades preceding this, largely due to the possibility of a direct conflict between the USA/NATO and Russia, taking off from the ongoing proxy war in Ukraine, and to a lesser extent the possibility of a direct war between the USA and China. An even broader war with NATO, a few Asian allies and possibly Australia on one side and the 'axis' of Russia, China, Iran and North Korea on the other side has also been discussed as a more distant possibility which, however, cannot be entirely ruled out, even though it would surely be a complete disaster.

Einstein, when asked about what a third world war would look like responded that he does not know how the third war would be fought, but the fourth one would be fought with stones. He was referring of course to the reality of wars becoming so destructive that the third world war would in fact ruin the world almost entirely.

Wars have become even more destructive since Einstein spoke these words, and their destructiveness appears destined to increase further, as more and more resources and human ingenuity are being diverted to increase destructive capabilities instead of constructive ones, even though millions and millions remain deprived of even basic needs and the requirements of ecological repair and rehabilitation are perhaps the most urgent.

Hence while the 20th century witnessed a six fold increase in war and conflict related mortality compared to the 19th century, the 21st century may witness something unique and unprecedented in the already highly destructive history of war and conflict—it may witness wars with the capacity of wiping out, in terms of direct and indirect impacts, most of the life on earth and almost the entire human life, apart from disrupting very badly the basic life-enabling and life-nurturing conditions of the planet.

This would be the inevitable result if only 10 per cent of the existing stockpile of nuclear weapons are used. However even more destructive weapons of mass destruction are being developed, and due to a relentless quest for dominance that appears to be blind to all its grave dangers, the biggest military and economic powers are more frequently seen to be on the verge of direct confrontation and war.

Hence this writer has been arguing consistently for quite some time that the present time is not just for incremental reform (although even that would be welcome) but instead for bravely and steadily moving towards a no-war future. In such a future scenario, no soldier or officer or armed forces (army, air force or navy) would suffer any loss of job or income but would merely be diverted, with some training, towards jobs relating to ecological rehabilitation of land and oceans, to preventing and reducing disasters and to various kinds of rescue and life-saving efforts.

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