

Stopping The War In Ukraine Now Is The Only Option



Willem de Haan

It might not be 'cool' to lay down weapons now, but it would mean the end of senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Reuters estimates that, after three weeks of war, 14,000 people have been killed, 2,7 million people have fled, 1,700 buildings have been destroyed and damages exceed 110 billion euro. The trauma that will result from what is happening in Ukraine will last decades.

Defense budgets all over Europe are being increased and relationships with Russia will be disrupted for years to come.

Whenever there is fighting, we seem to be grabbed by a hunger for war: Nuances disappear and a choice must be made between good and evil. The complex reality doesn't matter anymore, nor do the reasons for the conflict.

Language as a weapon

Language also becomes a weapon in times of war: "Those who do not support us militarily, want us to slowly die", says Zelensky. It may sound logic, but it's not true - nobody wants the Ukrainian people to slowly die.

The appeal is clear, however. If you care about us, you support us with weapons, whatever it takes. The Netherlands is also understanding of Zelensky's call for Polish fighter jets and Finland's wish to become a member of NATO. Both would be an extremely dangerous escalation.

Ukraine did not start this war, but every day Zelensky chooses to continue this unequal battle, he also bears responsibility for the death toll, the refugees and the destruction of his country.

A high price to pay

Continuing to fight maybe cool, but the people of Ukraine and soldiers on both sides are paying a terrible price. Putting weapons down might not be cool, but it would end the senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Even if it would cost him his life, ending the war would make Zelensky immortal, a true hero. Defending your country sounds noble, but what if the price is a completely destroyed country? With tens of thousands more dead and millions of refugees?

A report from the NOS Journaal (Dutch news report) sticks with me. A captured Russian soldier being interrogated somewhere in Ukraine. "How old are you?" Answer: 21 years old. "Where are you from?" From St Petersburg. "What are you doing here?" I was sent here. "What do you want?" I want to go home.

According to the voice-over the young man was later executed. Refusing to perform military service is incredibly difficult in both Russia and Ukraine. Soldiers do not have a choice, political leaders do. As Bob Dylan wrote in his song *Masters of War* in 1963: 'You put a gun in my hand / And you hide from my eyes.'

Peaceful protest

War is terrible and the next violent outbursts are already announcing themselves: Moldavia, Georgia, the Baltic States, Taiwan. Will we push the world closer to the brink of war? I prefer to draw hope from the peaceful protest Gandhi used against the British rule in India, the kind that Martin Luther King used to end segregation in the United States, how mass protests around the world helped end the war in Vietnam and how peaceful protest from the East Germans brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989.

According to War Resisters' International (WRI), an organization founded in 1921 to promote peace and antimilitarism, over 1,1 million Russians have signed a petition against the war started by Russian human rights activist Lev Ponomarev. Yurii Sheliashenko of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement called for peaceful protest three days after the start of the war, where most people only see military solutions. He considers a neutral Ukraine the best option for the future.

The only option

They know that violence only begets violence, history is full of it. Pacifism is not a popular concept in times of war, but among the people who believed in it and practiced it were Jesus of Nazareth and Albert Einstein, John Lennon and Mother Theresa. Call them idealists, but the world would be a far worse place without them.

Stopping the war now is the only option. Does that mean Putin gets his way? No. If he wants to occupy all of Ukraine and succeeds, he inherits a country of 44 million dissidents. Even for a dictator, that is a nightmare.

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