

Give war a chance



“ Give War a Chance” is an article written by the American economist, historian and military strategist Edward Nicolae Luttwak in 1999, in the American magazine Foreign Affairs. It make an easily understandable “ buzz”, since its main assumption is that most kind of peacekeeping or humanitarian operations are, in an objective point of view, a bad thing for the peace, and that it tends, paradoxically, to slower its establishment.

We will analyze here the main hypothesis that Luttwak is developing among the article, the first one being the destruction of the legitimacy usually accorded to peacekeeping operations, led by the UN or by other military organizations, and the second one being the obstacle to a durable peace establishment, created unwillingly by humanitarian help during conflicts. We will conclude on the suggestions made by the author on the evolution of international organizations’ way of intervening in nowadays conflicts.

For that, we will articulate our analysis on the following problematique: how peace-turned foreign interventions among conflicts end up being an obstacle for peace establishment? The analysis will follow the same path used by Luttwak, demonstrating how peacekeeping often turns into peace blocking, then how humanitarian interventions also do, and concluding on the position international organizations and NGOs should adopt to promote a durable peace more easily, according to the author. Problems and paradoxes of peacekeeping

The main idea here is quite simple to understand: forced peace is no good peace, since the only viable peace is the one established in the postwar era, which means there has to be a war, and it has to end “ naturally”, by its own. There has to be a climax of violence so that there can be a decrease of it,

ending to peace. Thus, interventions become, more than useless, obstacles to real peace establishment. Moreover, there is an inefficiency of military organizations regarding peace establishment as well as local population protection.

Forced peace is no good peace This idea is sustained by the argumentation that during a cease-fire or even after a forced peace signature between the belligerent camps can't lead to peace « because no path to peace is even visible, [and] the dominant priority is to prepare for future war rather than to reconstruct devastated economies and ravages societies". Indeed, if there's no obvious winner in a war, there can't be a coherent outcome since it would require an " imbalance of strength sufficient to end the fighting".

If uninterrupted war means death, suffering, etc, it leads to a stable situation and let the postwar era begin. As examples, the author uses the cases of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49 that could have come to an end in a matter of weeks, and also the recent cases in the Balkans. The inefficient protection of populations The main problem of UN peacekeeping operations, according to Edward Luttwak, is the inherent avoiding of violence of these operations, which leads to three main problems: No durable peace establishment as we just saw it

No real involvement in the conflict, giving the peacekeepers the status of spectators rather than actors, at best, or bad actors at worst. As we've seen it in class, " multinationals commands [...] find it difficult to control the quality and conduct of member states' troop" which can lead to " dead, mutilated, raped and tortured victims" during an operation. The perverse effect caused by the very presence of U. N. forces.

According to Luttwak, it “inhibits the normal remedy of endangered civilians, which is to escape from the combat zone”, without, however, guaranteeing them a safe protection. As an example, the author relates the disastrous consequence of the maintaining of local populations on the conflict zone, due to a cease-fire agreement settled with the locally dominant Bosnian Serbs in Sarajevo In 1992, settlement that was violated by the Serbs, leading to the killing of the local Muslims who could have fled instead.

There are also organizations such as European Union, Western European Union and OSCE seek to intervene in such situations while they lack the “rudimentary command structure and personnel” of the UN. What they do is that they pull off unarmed or slightly armed “observers” missions; which suffer just the same problems as UN and are simply inefficient. On the contrary, military organizations like NATO or such as the West African Peacekeeping Force (ECOMOG) do have the means to protect civilians efficiently from the damages of conflicts.

But even that often fails since these organizations tend to avoid any risk of casualties among their troops, thus avoiding combat and limiting their effectiveness. In Bosnia, U. S troops could potentially arrest known war criminals that crossed their checkpoints, but didn't, since it would have provoked confrontation. On the NATO's intervention against Serbia for the sake of Kosovo, the author puts in perspective the success publicly acclaimed of this operation.

Certainly, there's been a very successful air-cleansing operation, relying on the precautions took by NATO during its strike against the Serbs (few strikes during the first weeks, the targeting of air-defense systems first, minimizing

the risk of future casualties, the avoiding of anti-aircraft weapons by bombing from very high altitudes and the restriction to operate only under a clean weather). However, on the ground, there was the possibility for NATO to destroy armored vehicles that Serb soldiers used to use to terrorize local Albanian Kosovar populations.

There were anti-tanks helicopter (the Apaches), and some equipped to act without base support, but no country offered to use them in Kosovo while the terrible ethnic cleansing had already began, and this for self-safety reasons. Furthermore, when Apache helicopters from Germany were finally ordered to go operate in Albania, in spite of the amount money put into their supposed instantaneous readiness, it took more than 3 weeks of “predeployment preparations” to make it there. After 6 weeks into the war, no Apache had made a single mission.

But two of them had crashed during training. The excuse for that is not just “mere bureaucratic foot-dragging”, but the insistence from US Army to support the Apaches with “heavy rock barrages to suppress Serb anti-aircraft weapons”, thus creating a much larger logistical load than just the Apache, hence the delay. But even before the “Apache saga” began, there were available and deployable aircrafts in Italian bases of NATO that might have done the job as well (US 1-10 “Warthogs” and British Royal Air Force Harriers made for “low-altitude bombing at close range”).

None was sent, for, once again, motivations of safety. “In the calculus of the NATO democracies”, writes Luttwak, “the immediate possibility of saving thousands of Albanians from massacre and hundreds of thousands from deportation was obviously not worth the lives of a few pilots.” This kind of

policy reflects, according to Luttwak, an unavoidable political reality, and shows that even “ a large-scale and disinterested intervention” can fail to its primary humanitarian goal while it had widely enough potential to succeed.

The author even wonders whether the Kosovar would have been even better off if NATO just didn't act at all. Refugee nations * This is the second aspect developed by Luttwak, which again goes against mainstream theories about peaceful interventions among conflicts. According to him, in most cases, humanitarian help from the U. N or from NGOs mostly turn into an obstacle to conflict resolution and peace establishment. * As he says, the “ most disinterested intervention in war, and most destructive, are humanitarian relief activities”.

By the example, we can easily understand his point of view. * The largest of all humanitarian relief operation is URWA, in many territories around the Israeli-Arabic conflict zone. This operation is the successor of UNRRA, which operated in displayed camps in Europe just after WWII. UNRWA implementing took place in 1949-49 after the 1st Arab-Israeli war to “ feed, shelter, educate, and provide health services for Arab refugees who had fled Israeli zones in the former territory of Palestine”.

As opposed to UNRWA, UNRRA was, according to Luttwak, a success since the “ Spartan conditions” it offered to the European refugees encouraged “ rapid emigration or local resettlement [...] and helped disperse revanchist concentrations of national groups”. On the contrary, UNRWA camps in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip provided a general higher standard of living than most Arab villagers used to provide before,

with “ more varied diet, organized schooling, superior medical care, and no backbreaking labor in stony fields”.

They thus became desirable homes rather than transit camps for the refugees. Consequently, “ escaping civilians turned into lifelong refugees who gave birth to refugee children, who have in turn had refugee children on their own”, creating at the end a “ Palestinian refugee nation”, with the inherent drawback of preserving the resentments in “ as fresh a condition as they were in 1948”, and “ keeping the first bloom of revanchist emotion intact”.

Luttwak explains that “ by its very existence, the UNRWA dissuades integration into local society and inhibits emigration”. Moreover, it has facilitated the voluntary or forced enrolment of refugee youths into armed organizations that fight both Israel and other armed organizations of the same kind. Luttwak concludes: “ the UNRWA has contributed to a half-century of Arab-Israeli violence and still retards the advent of peace.

* As a comparison, the author claims that Europe would be filled with “ giant camps for millions of descendants of uprooted Gallo-Romans, abandoned Vandals, defeated Burgundians, and misplaced Visigoths – not to speak of more recent refugee nations such as post-1945 Sudeten Germans” if each European war had been helped by an UNRWA-like operation. Europe would then be a mere assembling of warring tribes, all full of resentments and belligerent wills, rather than the peaceful political construction it is today.

If consciences would have been relieved by helping each and every one at any time, peace would never have been achieved instead. The short term relief is not worth the long-term benefit it sacrifices. * There are UNRWA-like

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camps elsewhere, such as the one there used to be in Thailand, where the Cambodian camp along the border provided safe places for the mass-murdering Khmer Rouge. * The same principle is applicable for NGOs helping with humanitarian help in the poorest countries of the globe.

The reasoning is quite simple: since the goods provided by these organizations often overcome what is naturally available for non-refugees on this part of the globe, it has negative consequences on the conflict resolution, since it tries to maintain an equilibrium that has to be broken to achieve peace. As an example, Luttwak relates the events ongoing along the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo. NGOs provide help for a Hutu nation that “ should” have been dispersed instead, thus making consolidation of Rwanda impossible at the time.

Moreover, it even provides a launch base for a radical group willing to eradicate another tribe, the Tutsis. “ Humanitarian intervention has worsened the chances of a stable, long-term resolution of the tensions in Rwanda” says Luttwak. If providing shelter and safety for refugee nations is already, according to him, a bad thing, “ inserting material aid into ongoing conflicts is even worse”. The other idea developed by the author is that NGOs can’t defend themselves and thus can select who they should and should not provide with aid among the people they feed, shelter or heal, and thus they can’t exclude warriors.

By intervening, NGOs constantly reduce the chance of a decisive victory of one side on the other that could put an end to the war and bring peace, since they tend to help the weaker one, which is understandable. There are even cases of impartial NGOs alimending both side of a war. Luttwak ends his

argument by an extreme example in Somalia, where the money the NGOs paid for protection of local war bands wound up being used to buy arms. “ Those NGOs are therefore helping prolong the warfare they ostensibly seek to mitigate” concludes Luttwak.