

The war to end all wars:

Honouring the dead by learning the lessons

“The war to end all wars” ushered in a century of violence on an unprecedented scale. A hundred years on, the lessons to be learnt appear buried beneath a barrage of commemorative activities.

MAPW believes that Australia could best honour those who died by learning from the past. This series of papers outlines our failure to do so, and some ways forward.



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Cover art - Gassed is a 1919 painting by John Singer Sargent about the WWI mustard gas attacks
<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/2143>

Civilians and War - Then and Now



Amanda Ruler & Sue Wareham



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War has always been bad for civilians. Whether the impacts are the destruction of towns and villages, attacks on food supplies, or simply the grieving of widows and orphans, they are far-reaching.

However the past century has ushered in changes that have revolutionised our capacity to kill one another, and all but obliterated the distinction between civilians and combatants.

During World War 1, the percentage of the total deaths that were civilian is virtually impossible to estimate, but it is generally accepted to be a small minority. Many of them were related to hunger, malnutrition and disease caused by the deliberate targetting of trade and/or food supplies on both sides.

However by the end of the 20th century, the victims of armed conflict were far more likely to be civilians than soldiers. One estimate is that civilians made up 67% of the deaths from World War 2, and 90% of the deaths from wars in the 1990s ¹. And the deaths are of course only the tip of the iceberg of war-induced suffering. The impacts of injuries - both physical and psychological - are often very long-lasting, and affect not only the injured person but their family and community also.

A 2015 report, "Body Count", by affiliates of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, estimates that the "war on terror" has killed, directly or indirectly, approximately 1.3 million people in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. We do not know

how many of these are civilians; as the preface to the report states, civilian casualties are "officially ignored" by US authorities ².

Much of this staggering reversal in wars' impacts is due to technological developments in weapons and their means of delivery. During World War 1 aerial warfare was in its infancy, but by World War 2 it terrorised and killed hundreds of thousands of people in cities across Europe and Japan. In Vietnam, the US dropped more bombs than were dropped by all sides during World War 2³. Warfare reached its peak of indiscriminate destruction with nuclear weapons, the subject of the next chapter in this series.

Other civilian impacts of 20th century wars are multiple, and include the many tens of millions of landmines and cluster bombs left in the ground from past wars, the radioactive legacy left by depleted uranium weapons, and deliberate acts of environmental sabotage. Examples of the latter include the setting alight of 600 oil wells by Saddam Hussein in 1991⁴, and the spraying by US forces of herbicides over at least 10% of what was then South Vietnam, poisoning forest and farmlands⁵.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of warfare, and countless millions have been killed, maimed, terrorised, brutalised, orphaned or psychologically traumatised since World War 2.

Sexual crimes also are borne largely by civilians. Historically, armies considered rape one of the legitimate spoils of war. However in 1992, the UN Security Council declared that the massive and systematic rapes of women in the former

Yugoslavia were an international crime. In one of the worst of many other examples, an estimated 200,000 or more women were raped during the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo⁶.

Refugee numbers relate significantly to wars, and they are at record high levels. UNHCR's Global Trends 2013 report stated that by the end of that year, 51.2 million people had been forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, generalised violence or human rights violations⁷.

Another aspect of civilian suffering as a result of wars is the economic cost. Global military expenditure in 2014 was \$1.767 trillion ⁸ - funds that could otherwise be spent on health, education, development, environmental protection and remediation and many other necessities.

Justification for wars is generally claimed on the basis of an overwhelming moral necessity. However at a time in history when cities have become battlegrounds and the vast majority of those killed and brutalised in wars are innocent people, it is surely time to consider whether - regardless of the utility or otherwise of past wars in achieving their goals - the institution of war has lost any legitimacy it might have once had. The revolution in killing machines over the past 100 years demands smarter approaches to resolving conflict.

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1. Richard M Garfield and Alfred I Neugut. War and Public Health, Eds Barry S Levy and Victor W Sidel, Oxford University Press 1997. Page 33
2. IPPNW Germany, Physicians for Social Responsibility (USA), Physicians for Global Survival (Canada). 3. Body Count: Casualty figures after 10 years of the “War on Terror”. http://www.ippnw.de/commonFiles/pdfs/Frieden/Body_Count_first_international_edition_2015_final.pdf
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4. J Lash. Beware an ecological catastrophe in Iraq. International Herald Tribune, 13 December 2002.
5. Agent Orange and the Vietnamese: The Persistence of Elevated Dioxin Levels in Human Tissue. American Journal of Public Health. April 1995, Vol 85, No 4
6. United Nations : Background information on Sexual Violence Used as a Tool of War, 2015: www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/about/bgsexualviolence.shtml
7. <http://www.unhcr.org/5399a14f9.html>
8. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database



6. From Gas to Nukes: Banning the World's Worst Weapons

Tim Wright



From Gas to Nukes – Banning the World’s Worst Weapons

Tim Wright

The widespread use of chemical weapons during World War I resulted in an estimated 100,000 fatalities and one million casualties¹, and shocked the world with the horrific suffering these weapons inflicted. Eager to prevent such weapons from ever being used again, the international community negotiated a treaty in 1925 known as the Geneva Protocol², which prohibited the use of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, as well as bacteriological methods of warfare.

Although the Geneva Protocol was unable to prevent some nations from continuing to develop, produce and use chemical weapons, their anticipated widespread use in World War II did not eventuate: only relatively small quantities of mustard gas were used in China by Japan.

However, World War II saw the use of a vastly more powerful weapon, the atomic bomb, which destroyed the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in an instant, leaving close to a quarter of a million people dead by the end of 1945, almost all of them civilians.

These attacks prompted the United Nations General Assembly, in its very first resolution, to establish a commission that would make proposals “for the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction”.³ However, the United States continued to build up its nuclear stockpile at full pace, with several other nations soon developing arsenals

too. From a peak of nearly 70,000 nuclear weapons in the mid-1980s, mostly US and Soviet, the world still has more than 15,000⁴, including hundreds maintained on hair-trigger alert, and the nuclear-armed states have no plans to disarm.

Efforts to free the world from chemical weapons have been much more successful. In 1992 nations drafted the landmark Chemical Weapons Convention⁵, which outlawed not merely the use of chemical weapons, but also their production and possession, and established mechanisms to verify their destruction worldwide.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 for its achievements. In accepting the prize, the organisation’s director-general, Ahmet Üzümcü, said: “Our task is to consign chemical weapons to history, forever ... Under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the OPCW has so far verified the destruction of more than 80 per cent of all declared chemical weapons. We have also implemented a wide range of measures to prevent such weapons from re-emerging. And with 190 states now members of this global ban, we are hastening the vision of a world free of chemical weapons to reality.”⁶

The use of chemical weapons in Syria in March and August 2013 demonstrated the norm-setting power of international law. The fact that Syria was not party to the Chemical Weapons Convention did not matter at all to the standards to which it was held accountable, and Syria did subsequently accede to the convention, giving up its stockpile for destruction.

While both chemical and biological weapons have

been categorically prohibited under international law, the same cannot be said for nuclear weapons – despite their catastrophic humanitarian consequences and unparalleled destructive capacity. A few dozen nations, including Australia, still claim that nuclear weapons are legitimate, lawful and necessary for security.

In a 2014 lecture, Angela Kane, the UN high representative for disarmament affairs, highlighted the international community’s failure to stigmatise and prohibit nuclear weapons in the same way it has chemical and biological weapons: “How many states today boast that they are ‘biological weapon states’ or ‘chemical weapon states’? Who is arguing now that bubonic plague or polio are legitimate to use as weapons under any circumstance, whether in an attack or in retaliation? Who speaks of a bio-weapon umbrella?”⁷

However, the tides appear to be turning for nuclear disarmament. More and more nations are calling for negotiations to begin on a treaty banning nuclear weapons. A series of major diplomatic conferences hosted by Norway, Mexico and Austria since 2013 have demonstrated beyond doubt that nuclear weapons inflict unacceptable harm and must be outlawed. And a clear majority of nations have pledged to work together to fill this gap in international law.

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1. <http://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention/genesis-and-historical-development/>
2. <http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Bio/1925GenevaProtocol.shtml>
3. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/1%28I%29
4. <http://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>
5. <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention/>
6. http://nobelpeaceprize.org/en_GB/laureates/laureates-2013/OPCW-lecture/
7. <http://www.nziaa.org.nz/Portals/285/documents/lists/259/HR%20statement%20to%20NZIAA.pdf>
8. <http://www.icanw.org/pledge/>

“There is really only one story worth telling about the Great War: it was a common European tragedy – a filthy, disgusting and hideous episode of industrialised killing. Not the first, and not the last. It was unredeemed by victory. The uplifting element of the story lies in the struggle to avert it.” Douglas Newton, in “*The Darkest Days: The truth behind Britain’s rush to war, 1914*”

MAPW:

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) is a professional not-for-profit organisation that works to promote peace and disarmament. MAPW aims to reduce the physical, psychological and environmental impacts of wars. We have branches in every state and territory in Australia.

