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The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Mediators

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Ken Cloke

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by Kenneth Cloke

> If men hate each other, then there's no hope. We will all be victims of that hate. We will slaughter each other in wars we don't want and for which we're not responsible. They'll put a flag in front of us and fill our ears with words. And why? To plant the seeds for a new war, to create more hatred, to create new flags and new words. Is that why we're here? To have children and hurl them into the fiery furnace? To build cities and then raze them to the ground? To long for peace and have war instead? … The day when we can build on love has still not arrived. **Jose Saramago**

> [T]he man of violence … cannot exempt himself from suffering. His occasional efforts to destroy others are merely a roundabout route to his own destruction. Beneath his self-confidence, his braggadocio, lurks a fanatic of disaster… And we are all violent — men of anger who, having lost the key of quietude, now have access only to the secrets of laceration. **E.M. Cioran**

> No matter the paid parades, the forced applause, the instigated riots, the organised protests (pro or con), self- or state censoring, the propaganda; no matter the huge opportunities for profit and gain; no matter the history of injustice – at bottom it is impossible to escape the suspicion that the more sophisticated the weapons of war, the more antiquated the idea of war. The more transparent the power grab, the holier the justification, the more arrogant the claims, the more barbaric, the more discredited the language of war becomes. **Toni Morrison**

Margaret Atwood may have put it best: "War is what happens when language fails." As mediators, we can add that war is what happens when people are demonised and disrespected, when needs remain unaddressed and interests unsatisfied. It is what

happens when pressing problems are ignored, when intense emotions are left unheard and unacknowledged, and when conflicts are allowed to fester, turning small, preventable, easily resolvable differences into immense, unavoidable, intractable crises in which violence seems the only way out.

Every mountain was once the size of a molehill, and there was always some earlier time when opportunities to prevent it from turning violent or becoming overwhelming were readily available, more easily implemented, and completely ignored. Ukraine is thus a failure — not only of language, but of caring, of listening, of imagination, of skill, of determination, and of our own inadequate efforts as mediators to strengthen conflict resolution capacity globally, and to transform the ways we think about, respond to, and *prevent* conflicts — not just personally, relationally, and organisationally, but socially, economically, politically, culturally, and environmentally.

Many interesting, important, useful, and insightful articles have been written about the war in Ukraine, and rather than focus on the history, background, incidents and motivations that led to this devastating collapse of peace, I want to consider the lessons and implications for mediators, peace builders, dialogue facilitators, collaborative negotiators, diversity professionals, restorative justice practitioners and similar disciplines, all of which are experienced on a much smaller scale in seeking to assist committed adversaries and hostile parties to resolve their conflicts and reach agreements.

What, then, are the *generic* lessons of the war in Ukraine for conflict resolvers? First, it is important to acknowledge that *numerous* advance warnings, predictable outcomes and opportunities to mediate the underlying issues between Russia and Ukraine were present long before the invasion, as they are in *all* conflicts, on all scales. And, as in all conflicts, these were ignored, or repressed, or made worse by arrogance, bullying, demonisation, insults, posturing, trivialisation, dismissal of dialogue, aggressive bargaining and refusals to mediate — and not only by the immediate parties, but by their proxies and supporters, critics and detractors.

To address these problems and try to prevent future wars, we require *higher order* skills in a rich, diverse array of communication, collaborative negotiation and conflict resolution techniques. We also need new forms of *diplomacy*, fresh approaches to justice, and innovative ways of thinking about the nation-state that allow us to shift from competitive power- and rights-based methods, to collaborative interest-based ones. We may then realise, as journalist Anne O'Hare McCormick wrote following World War II, that “the real test of power is not capacity to make war but capacity to prevent it”.

The Prussian General and military strategist Carl von Clausewitz famously wrote that “"War is the continuation of politics by other means." The causes of all wars can thus be found in unresolved social, economic, and political conflicts; and in the inability, disinterest, and lower order skills in listening, acknowledging, collaborating, and satisfying every nation’s deepest interests in non-zero sum ways.

The war in Ukraine is not simply a solitary incident between two nation-states with isolated issues and a unique history, but a *major* escalation in a rapidly shifting on-going global power contest to determine which countries, political systems and views of the world will dominate and get to determine the global future for everyone, and whether we will find ways of solving international problems collaboratively, with immensely important and lasting consequences for all.

Just as wars in Ethiopia, Manchuria, and Spain presaged World War II, and skirmishes in 'Bleeding Kansas' hinted at what was to come in the US Civil War, the contest for global dominance taking place in Ukraine suggests an increasing willingness to bypass rights-based principles of international law, which, once weakened, can be used to justify the barbaric use of military, economic and political force, sparking similar violations elsewhere. The most important of these rights aim at protecting civilians from war crimes, violations of the Geneva Conventions, and refusals to recognise the principles of self-determination, sovereignty and independence.

The war in Ukraine is also linked to a growing number of seemingly disconnected political conflicts over democracy that are taking place around the world, and in this sense the invasion represents a clear refusal and rejection by autocrats — not just in Russia, but in Hungary, the Middle East, India, the US, and elsewhere — of the core tenets of democracy, and the right of all people to freely vote, participate in and choose their governments.

Yet wars *require* governments to manipulate the ways people think, control their use of language, censor media, and distort public communications, as part of power-based efforts to unilaterally determine who will 'win', what policies the victor will be able to implement, and the limits of what can be done to the vanquished. These acts, together with the nature of war itself, make the leaders of war-like countries appear insane to anyone viewing them from the outside.

War is indeed a form of insanity, a loss of reason, a crime, and an irrational approach to problem solving. This becomes clearer and more obvious as alternative solutions become available . Yet the insanity, criminality and evil we ascribe to our opponents in nearly every conflict can easily be turned into justifications for our own aggression, violence, 'crimes of state' and war. As George Orwell trenchantly observed: "Every war when it comes, or before it comes, is represented not as a war, but as an act of self-defense against a homicidal maniac."

There is thus a common thread linking the war in Ukraine to the January 6, 2021 insurrection in the US, connecting what Russia and Ukraine *stand for* politically with other conflicts, including disputes over masks and vaccines, restrictions on the right to vote, denials of climate change, roadblocks to renewable energy, prohibitions on abortion, attacks on "critical race theory," forbidding teaching or discussing LGBTQ+ issues in schools, banning and burning books, violent attacks by white supremacist and neo-fascist groups, justifications of police violence, battles over gun control and similar issues.

These divergent political beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, and values point to deeper sources of conflict in our relationships with one another, leading to contrasting approaches to problem solving, negotiation and conflict resolution, giving rise to vastly different futures for the planet. These differences, from a conflict resolution perspective, can be defined by their *orientation* either to competitive, adversarial, hierarchical, 'zero sum' processes, relationships and cultures; or to shared, collaborative, heterarchical, 'non-zero sum' ones. A rough, partial list of these differences would include the following items, to which many others can be added:

Zero sum orientation	**Non-zero sum orientation**
Autocratic	Democratic
Authoritarian	Collaborative
Aggressive	Accommodative
Hierarchical	Heterarchical
Domination and superiority	Partnership and equality
Power- or rights-based	Interest-based
Rule-driven	Values-driven
Uniformity and conformity	Diversity and complexity
Monologues and voting	Dialogues and consensus
Focus on order and security	Focus on equity and justice
War and violence	Diplomacy and peacebuilding
Rigid race, class and caste roles	Fluid race, class and caste relations
Restricted roles for women	Gender equality
Shaming of LGBTQ People	Inclusion of LGBTQ people

Hostility to outsiders and migrants	Welcoming to outsiders and migrants
Suspicion of science	Respect for science
Censorship of books and art	Literary and artistic freedom
Focus on blaming, fault finding	Focus on joint problem solving
Resistance to change	Encouragement of change
Norms of secrecy	Norms of transparency
Isolated, divided, and private	Interactive, connected, and social
Uniformity, conformity	Diversity and freedom
Conflict avoidance and aggression	Conflict prevention and transformation

In each of these examples, significant differences exist between divisive attitudes that regard others as competitors and adversaries and inclusive ones that regard them as collaborators and allies. The first *seem* to make sense when problems are viewed as local or regional, or there are scarce resources, or there is fierce competition for dominance and survival. The second make more sense when problems are viewed as global in scope, or there are adequate resources to go around, or survival can be maximised by sharing resources fairly and strengthening empathy and collaboration.

Each orientation leads to profoundly different social values, economic systems, forms of government and environmental policies. Each triggers different ideas and emotions. Each rewards and penalises different attitudes toward others, uses different processes to encourage different relationships and invite different approaches to dialogue, problem solving, negotiation and mediation.

The first category leads to heightened perceptions of loss and increasing willingness

to use war and violence to win *over and against* enemies and competitors. The second lead to heightened perceptions of commonality and increasing willingness to use mediation and peace building to win *with and for* others, strengthening unity and collaboration and eliminating the need for enemies.

Adopting a longer-range perspective, we can therefore view the war in Ukraine as an escalating move in an on-going *competitive* global power contest, increasingly aggravated by polarised responses to climate change and migration, political divisiveness and hostility, the decline in US economic hegemony and the post-World War II 'Pax Americana'. All of this takes place against a background of growing competition for resources and markets and catastrophic environmental changes, all combining to encourage a resort to military power where diplomacy has proven ineffective in satisfying national interests.

Indeed, if we imagine a perhaps not-so-distant dystopian future in which we fail to stop global warming, leading to a catastrophic collapse of the ability of millions of people to survive in their countries of origin — like what is happening today, but on a vastly larger scale — we can predict that hundreds of millions of people will begin to migrate in search of survival, or a better life.

The chaos, conflicts and pressures created as a result will increasingly narrow the options of nation-states to two. First, they can adopt a policy of exclusion, selfishness, and 'us first', resulting in walls, fences, competition, starvation, stereotyping, ostracism, fear, hatred, cruelty, violence, war and genocide. Or,

second, they can adopt a policy of inclusion, sharing, and 'us together', resulting in bridges, support, collaboration, openness, empathy, caring, compassion, social justice, peace building and community.

The first option requires autocracy and the elimination of independent journalism. It necessitates censorship, book burning and the promotion of cultures of enmity, aggression, and war. The second requires democracy, journalistic freedom, open dialogue, mediation and the promotion of cultures of peace and collaboration.

Each of these paths requires skill sets, including capacities for listening. The second calls for empathy, dialogue, collaboration, negotiation, mediation, restorative justice and other forms of conflict resolution. Each culminates in *vastly* different futures, raising the stakes and increasing or reducing the willingness of people to kill and die in their efforts to achieve them.

If this perception is accurate, our efforts to support Ukraine, and to prevent future wars that are already gaining momentum, will be opposed — not only by autocrats, nationalists, and militarists everywhere — for reasons that have little or nothing to do with Ukraine and Russia. Opposition to a more collaborative approach comes from many who are frightened of what is coming. They may seek the illusion of personal security through autocratically imposed political order or simply feel they lack the skills to solve global problems collaboratively.

At a deeper, somewhat paradoxical and counter-intuitive level, we can regard war as a form of conflict resolution — one that seeks to resolve disputes by destroying the

other side, without recognising that the other side also exists simultaneously *inside us,* in the form of our capacity for empathy and compassion. Activate these in any conflict and people will begin to relate to their opponents as human beings, sapping their will to murder others and die for some greater cause, even within invading armies and the leaders of aggressor nations.

A common justification offered for war and lesser forms of violence, is to put an end to some on-going conflict — even by murdering, crushing, and silencing those on the other side, whose very efforts at self-defence are seen as acts of aggression. Yet in doing so, we also — but less obviously murder, crush, and silence trust, collaboration, honesty, empathy, compassion, integrity, wisdom, hope, curiosity and caring inside ourselves and, increasingly, in our opponents. As a result, war and violence make it difficult, if not impossible, to prevent or solve complex problems, instantly turning them into chronic, intractable conflicts, then into crises and then into catastrophes.

For these reasons, mediators seek to replace these zero sum power- and rights-based approaches with non-zero sum *interest*-based alternatives, consisting of non-violent communication, dialogue, joint problem solving, collaborative negotiation, consensus-building, mediation, restorative justice and similar methods. Yet it is *equally* critical that we seek to replace autocratic and dictatorial forms of decision-making — not just with procedural, rights-based, indirect, representative, electoral democracies, but with substantive, interest-based, direct, participatory, consensus-building democracies in which people are no longer regarded as political *objects* to be

manipulated. Instead, they are viewed as the *subjects* of social problem solving, with a right to voice their concerns both individually and collectively, to make decisions freely and independently and to shift from adversarial to collaborative relations with others.

Wars require a passive, compliant, consenting public, and the flimsy excuses and justifications routinely offered by politicians for military aggressions, invasions and the murders of innocents break down over time, even in moderately democratic states, leading first to silence and doubt, then courageous dissent, increasing opposition, and a growing sense of the pointlessness and futility of using military solutions to solve non-military problems.

This malaise begins to impact morale, not only among students, intellectuals, critics, and artists, but also among soldiers, civil servants, and those who harbour an empathetic or moral distaste for violence.

In a former life, I spent many years seeking to end the war in Vietnam, including years of work with dissenting soldiers and veterans, and a significant contribution to stopping that war came with the unraveling of an unquestioned political consensus in the US and the rest of the world. That consensus unraveled not only among students and public intellectuals, but within the military, in the media and the arts and, spreading outwards, steadily weakened the state's ability to justify its escalating cruelty, or even *imagine* what it would mean to be victorious.

While autocrats, dictators, and generals pretend they are immune from public

pressure and viciously punish those who do not enthusiastically support their violent projects, they are increasingly driven to substitute dogma for analysis, obedience for thought, monologue for dialogue, autocracy for democracy, destruction for creation and contempt for respect for others. All of these undermine morale, motivation and unthinking initial support for war. These then reach a critical mass, leading to the collapse of consensus *within* an existing autocracy, a growing desire to end the war and, often, to a brief, temporary victory for peace, civil society, collaboration and democracy.

To avoid these outcomes and the loss of prestige, wealth and power they entail, wartime governments increase the levels of internal disaffection by constricting the use of language, treating dissenters as traitors, and banishing the freedom of journalists, artists, and intellectuals. For example, one of the first steps taken in Russia to suppress opposition to the war in Ukraine was to criminalise any reference to it as a 'war' or 'invasion' and require everyone to refer to it instead as a 'special operation'. Interestingly, this occurred at nearly the same time that the Republican majority in Florida voted to make it illegal to refer to homosexuality in schools, by passing the 'don't say gay' law.

Moreover, both Russia and Florida, joined by several other states and countries, passed laws prohibiting the teaching of 'critical' approaches to history that might make people feel guilty or uncomfortable about things that happened in the past, either through 'critical race theory' or analysis of Russia's historic role in Ukraine, or

assertions that Ukraine is a separate nation, or that the present war is not a war at all, but glorious and morally justifiable, and similar efforts to re-write the past.

We are also able to notice, for example, the following initial responses by several highly regarded news agencies to the war in Ukraine, contrasting it with wars in the Middle East:

- *BBC:* “It’s very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blonde hair being killed.”
- *CBS News:* "This isn't Iraq or Afghanistan...This is a relatively civilised, relatively European city."
- *Al-Jazeera:* "What's compelling is looking at them, the way they are dressed. These are prosperous, middle-class people. These are not obviously refugees trying to get away from the Middle East...or North Africa. They look like any European family that you'd live next door to."
- *BFM TV (France):* "We are in the 21st century, we are in a European city, and we have cruise missile fire as though we were in Iraq or Afghanistan. Can you imagine!?”
  "It's an important question. We’re not talking here about Syrians fleeing... We're talking about Europeans."
  "To put it bluntly, these are not refugees from Syria, these are refugees from Ukraine...They're Christians, they're white. They're very similar [to us}."
- *The Daily Telegraph:* “This time, war is wrong because the people look like us and have Instagram and Netflix accounts. It's not in a poor, remote country anymore.”
- *ITV (UK):* "The unthinkable has happened...This is not a developing, third world nation; this is Europe!"

The biases and prejudices in these statements seem obvious, yet they do not fit the standard mould most cultures have created to define them, allowing people to distance and defend themselves from their implicit negative connotations. Indeed, international responses to similar invasions and wars in Yemen and Syria, or in Iraq and Afghanistan, or in Korea and Vietnam, did not produce *nearly* the same level of

outrage and opposition, nor were refugees from these countries welcomed as warmly as those from Ukraine.

These comments represent a kind of 'empathy shock' created by the collapse of a wartime stereotype in the face of real human beings, and the sudden return of recognition that there are deep, subconscious, moral and *human* connections between all of us that distant wars enable us to forgot. Yet it is critical in every war for both sides to create and sustain a sense of disconnect, distance, dread and division separating Us from Them, allowing Us to paint Them as alien, evil, cruel and insane; as enemies whose irrationality, perfidy, innate inferiority and hostile intentions justify using violence to dominate, subordinate, and punish them. Yet globally, as a *species*, there simply *is* no 'them' — there is only us.

The alienation and loss of empathy that emerge from these easily triggered biases and stereotypes, together with the fear and anger that magnify them, coalesce into adversarial stories and hostile narratives that demonise or diminish others, while victimising and privileging ourselves. The fact that these biases and stereotypes, fears and angers, stories and narratives take place in *all* wars, all acts of violence, and all conflicts, even petty, trivial, 'ordinary' ones, suggests that war is merely the large-scale organisation of small scale hatreds. The *internal* logic, reasoning and moral rationalisation for war, violence, and conflict, at the simplest level, seem to me to begin like this:

1. I/We am/are decent, reasonable, and nice.
2. Therefore, I/we do not *deserve* to be treated badly.

3. If someone treats me/us badly, it cannot therefore be because of something I/we did, but something about who they are.
4. The hostility he/she/they directed against me/us is therefore imbalanced, disproportionate, unfair, and unjust, as I/we did nothing to deserve it.
5. The only reason he/she/they would engage in such hostile behaviour against me/us can only be that he/she/they is/are cruel, insane, immoral, and evil.
6. His/her/their cruelty, insanity, immorality and evil therefore justifies me/us in suppressing my/our empathy and behaving hostilely in response.
7. Since he/she/they are cruel, insane, immoral, and evil, there is no point in trying to communicate, negotiate or mediate with him/her/them.
8. Indeed, doing so would mean condoning his/her/their cruelty, insanity, immorality, and evil, and permitting it to continue.
9. I/we am/are therefore not morally or ethically responsible for reaching out to him/her/them, or for communicating, negotiating and mediating to end the conflict.
10. Since he/she/they have ignored my/our needs, wishes, and interests and spurned my/our innate decency, reasonableness, and niceness, I/we are justified in acting unilaterally and autocratically, and using war and violence to force him/her/them to provide what I/we want or need.

It is possible, of course, to 'reverse engineer' this process by stimulating biases and stereotypes, stories and narratives, fears and angers, demonisations and victimisations in order to retrospectively justify the use of power and violence to strip others of what rightfully belongs to them. In this way, anti-Semitic stereotypes were promoted by the Nazis to justify the theft of Jewish wealth, jobs, art and other resources; and racial stereotypes were used to validate slavery, exploitation, segregation and imprisonment.

Many researchers, including Kurt and Kati Spillman, have studied these processes and identified common elements in the ways we demonise others. These, in my view, include:

- *Assumption of injurious intentions* — they intended to cause the harm we experienced.
- *Distrust* — every idea or statement made by them is wrong or proposed for dishonest reasons.
- *Externalisation of huilt* -—everything bad or wrong is their fault.
- *Attribution of evil* — they want to destroy us and what we value most, and must therefore be destroyed themselves.
- *Zero sum interests* — everything that benefits them harms us, and *vice versa*.
- *Paranoia and preoccupation with disloyalty* — any criticism of us or praise of them is disloyal and treasonous.
- *Prejudgment* — everyone in the enemy group is an enemy.
- *Collapse of neutrality and independence into opposition* — anyone who is not with us is against us.
- *Suppression of empathy* — we have nothing in common and considering them human is dangerous.
- *Isolation and impasse* — we cannot dialogue, negotiate, co-operate, or resolve conflicts with them.
- *Self-fulfilling prophecy* — their evil makes it permissible for us to act in a hostile way toward them — and *vice versa*.

These assumptions help initiate what Albert Bandura labeled “moral disengagement,”

which takes place through a number of processes or steps, including:

- *Rationalising* the possible beneficial consequences of otherwise wrong behaviours that are imagined to outweigh their negative consequences. (‘If I make enough money by doing this I can help people later.’)
- *Obscuring* or lessening personal responsibility for participating in the wrongful activity. (‘I just did what I was told.’ ‘I just played a small part. ‘Other people do the same thing, so why can’t I?’)

- *Denying* the seriousness of harmful effects on others. ('He won't mind.' 'He's going to be fine.' 'It was only a small thing.' 'He can claim it on his insurance.')
- *Blaming*, dehumanising, or derogating the victim. ('He was stupid.' 'She was a bitch.' 'It served him right.' 'She shouldn't have …')
- *Demonising* the perpetrator. ('He is vicious.' 'He's not human.' 'He should be shot.')
- *Magnifying* or exaggerating the harm that occurred. ('What he did [if a minor infraction] is intolerable.')
- *Distancing* or separating from both sides. ('A plague on both their houses.' 'It has nothing to do with me.')

The moral rationalisations people commonly offer in support of these mechanisms of disengagement can be found in all conflicts and, according to Bandura, include:

- *Moral justification*: 'He did it first.'
- *Euphemistic labeling*: 'All I did was …'
- *Disadvantageous comparison*: 'He's much worse than I am.'
- *Displacement of responsibility*: 'She made me do it.'
- *Diffusion of responsibility*: 'Everyone is doing it.'
- *Disregard/distortion of consequences:* 'What I did wasn't that bad.'
- *Dehumanisation*: 'He deserved it.'
- *Blaming the victim*: 'She was asking for it.'

In these ways, war, violence, aggression and unresolved conflicts gradually undermine not only our *individual* capacity to engage in empathetic, compassionate, moral and ethical behaviour, they also reduce our ability to oppose inhumane treatment by

others. However, it is our *collective* capacity for democratic decision-making, for twisting and distorting the nature of the individuals, groups and nation-states that promote them, that reduces our individual capacity to act fairly. It does so by crushing empathy, creating a divided sense of self within the aggressor; by punishing honesty, integrity and integration and by instilling a fear of ostracism and, alongside it, a repressed wish for connection.

In 1918, near the end of World War I, Sigmund Freud wrote an article entitled *Reflections on War and Death* about the layered rationalisations nation-states establish during wartime to justify their actions:

> [T]he state forbids [the citizen] to do wrong not because it wishes to do away with wrongdoing but because it wishes to monopolise it... A state at war makes free use of every injustice, every act of violence, that would dishonor the individual. It employs not only permissible cunning but conscious lies and intentional deception against the enemy, and this to a degree which apparently outdoes what was customary in previous wars. The state demands the utmost obedience and sacrifice of its citizens, but at the same time it treats them as children through an excess of secrecy and a censorship of news and expression of opinion which render the minds of those who are thus intellectually repressed defenseless against every unfavourable situation and every wild rumor. It absolves itself from guarantees and treaties by which it was bound to other states, makes unabashed confession of its greed and aspiration to power, which the individual is then supposed to sanction out of patriotism.

The State does these things, in part, to achieve its highest goal, which is the *complete* unification of the nation-state, total loyalty to its leaders and absolute obedience to its will. This is the dream of autocrats, dictators and power-mongers everywhere. Also writing in 1918, Randolphe Bourne described the role of war in

achieving these goals, reaching similar conclusions to Freud's. In an article provocatively entitled, "*War is the Health of the State*," Bourne wrote:

> Minorities are rendered sullen, and some intellectual opinion, bitter and satirical. But in general, the nation in wartime attains a uniformity of feeling, a hierarchy of values, culminated at the undisputed apex of the State ideal, which could not possibly be produced through any other agency than war. Other values such artistic creation, knowledge, reason, beauty, the enhancement of life, are instantly and almost unanimously sacrificed and the significant classes who have constituted themselves the amateur agents of the State are engaged not only in sacrificing these values for themselves but in coercing all other persons into sacrificing them.

Bourne went on to describe the energy, righteousness and certainty that are encouraged and heightened by war, helping to create a *passive* consensus in support of violence, militaristic solutions, authoritarian leadership, repression of dissent, and rationalising the rejection of dialogue, negotiation and mediation, likening them to treason:

> War — or at least modern war waged by a democratic republic against a powerful enemy — seems to achieve for a nation almost all that the most inflamed political idealist could desire. Citizens are no longer indifferent to their Government but each cell of the body politic is brimming with life and activity. We are at last on the way to full realisation of that collective community in which each individual somehow contains the virtue of the whole. In a nation at war, every citizen identifies himself with the whole, and feels immensely strengthened in that identification. The purpose and desire of the collective community live in each person who throws himself whole-heartedly into the cause of war. The impeding distinction between society and the individual is almost blotted out. At war, the individual becomes almost identical with his society. He achieves a superb self-assurance, an intuition of the rightness of all his ideas and emotions, so that in the suppression of opponents or heretics he is invincibly strong ….

Thus, beneath the drive to war and hatred of the enemy there lies, paradoxically, a desire for *unity* and togetherness — not only in the complex, problematic, potentially conflictual form of diverse individuals with different needs and unique interests; but in the far simpler, less troublesome, and ego-satisfying form of unquestioning loyalty, uniformity, obedience, and surrender to the dominance, dictates, and punitive power of the absolutist State, as embodied in the One True Leader. For these reasons, as Adrienne Rich reminds us,

> War is an absolute failure of imagination, scientific and political. That a war can be represented as helping a people to 'feel good' about themselves, or their country, is a measure of that failure.

It is possible, however, to supplement our 'fight, flight, or freeze' instinct — not only with "*fawning*," or currying favour with an adversary (which Anna Freud labeled "identification with the enemy") — but also, I suggest, with '*flocking'*, or outnumbering, 'out-organising', and 'out-unifying' the opposing side. These additions to our standard neurophysiological repertoire suggest that mediators might successfully transform the innate desire for unity and connection from a *negative* process of opposing others and seeking victory 'over and against' *people*; to a *positive* one of joining others, using collaboration and interests to solve both sides' *problems,* and seeking victory 'with and for' everyone in every conflict.

Yet this desire for unity and connection against external enemies and internal critics can also lead nations and conflicted parties to *genericise* their fears, angers, biases, prejudices and war-like feelings and to transfer them from one adversary to another,

even prompting former combatants to cease their hostilities and make common cause against some new, common enemy. In the US, for example, hatreds can shift easily from Blacks to Native Americans, Jews, Chinese, Irish, Mexicans, Italians, Vietnamese, Muslims or any other racial or even religious group.

Thus, wars and conflicts are not only personal, ahistorical, and specific, but impersonal, trans-historic and generic. They are not only events, but forms and processes, cultures and relationships that are *always* able to mutate and find fresh targets. For this reason, *we* are the enemy in every war — but we are also the perpetrators and the next victims. It is therefore in all our interests to help stop the war in Ukraine and to prevent the future ones that will follow.

How mediators can help stop this war, and the next one

As Desmond Tutu wrote: "There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in." Of course, we need to support Ukrainians and do what we can to stop this war, but if we are to prevent future wars, we also need to analyse how they begin, and start dismantling them at their deeper, systemic sources.

Doing so, however, will require higher order skills in communication, dialogue, peace building, political problem solving, mediation and other conflict resolution practices, at levels significantly greater than war and acquiescence demand. Yet this is exactly what each of these practices seeks to achieve every day, in every nation, in every conflict.

It is, of course, axiomatic, as antiwar Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin observed, that "You can no more win a war than you can win an earthquake." What, then, can mediators do to end this war, and at the same time try to prevent the next war and those that will follow? How do we halt, early on, even at the very beginning, the slow but inexorable metamorphosis of molehills into mountains? How is it possible in the midst of violence to even *imagine* peace, let alone create the conditions that allow it to flourish?

The easy answer is that wars are simply scaled-up conflicts, and whatever has proven successful in resolving scaled-down, everyday conflicts between ordinary people might also prove effective in settling much larger disputes, even between the heads of nation-states. This insight allows us to realise that we can *immediately* begin applying a full range of useful dispute resolution techniques, with minor modifications and adjustments, to political, environmental and international conflicts.

The more difficult answer requires us to recognise, first, that part of what makes mediation and related conflict resolution processes successful is that, on a small scale, the stakes are relatively insignificant, whereas between nation-states they can be far more devastating, impactful and difficult to resolve. What collaborative negotiators call the "best alternative to a negotiated agreement," or BATNA, in minor disputes may be litigation, and the worst alternative, or WATNA (worst alternative to a negotiated agreement), may be a relatively modest financial loss. In disputes between countries, on the other hand, the best alternative may be an ineffective,

inconclusive diplomatic stalemate; while the worst may include death, destruction, genocide, colonisation and loss of freedom.

Second, the orientation of nation-states to adversarial, competitive, win or lose, power-based outcomes predictably favours the selection of leaders who actively pursue these goals, and may be more skillful and successful in achieving them, thereby turning the political process in a circle and generating systems that are *always* inclined to war-like results. As Israeli novelist David Grossman observed:

> It is highly rational for a nation always in a state of war to elect combatants as its leaders. But could it be possible that the fact that those combatants are the nation's leaders decrees that the nation be in a constant state of war?

The same point can be made regarding national institutions and organisations, as with NATO and SEATO (the South East Asia Treaty Organisation), and the global military-industrial-political complex, which require an unending stream of enemies; or with the unequal social hierarchies, inequitable economic systems, adversarial political processes and short-term environmental policies that flow from them; or with the stereotypes and biases, controlled languages, divisiveness and polarisations, exploitative natures and the cultures of violence that support them.

There are many simple, sensible and sane solutions to the destructiveness of modern warfare that are nonetheless impossible to implement in the present environment — such as complete disarmament, starting with nuclear arsenals, fighter jets, missiles, tanks, bombs, gas and biological agents, all the way down to assault rifles, grenades,

and similar weapons. Or, nations might be persuaded to cede their 'sovereign' right to wage war to a global body such as the United Nations that could then countermand orders to invade or attack another country, or mandate mediation, arbitration, or adjudication. None of these, however, are at all likely any time soon.

On a smaller scale, many years ago I spent some time in Ukraine mediating, facilitating dialogues between Ukrainians and Russians and training mediators and psychologists in both countries. One of the Russians commented at the time that the *idea* that there could be a third party in a conflict, or an unbiased mediation, or a mutually agreeable solution that acknowledged the other side's interests, *did not exist*. Today, it barely exists, and needs to be supported and strengthened — in effect, suggesting the opening of a kind of 'second front' *inside* aggressor nations.

This suggests that social media, Zoom calls, and similar ways of connecting can be used by individual mediators to offer solidarity and support to the citizens of invaded nations; that mediators can create large and small scale dialogues with citizens of both countries; and that we can speak directly from afar with the citizens of invading nations — even during wartime — in an effort to encourage empathy, compassion, and non-adversarial, non-biased communications, and find other ways of 'fraternising' with the 'enemy'.

Because wars are chaotic, they are sensitively dependent on existing conditions, leading to a kind of 'butterfly' effect, as with the weather, which routinely magnifies

small perturbations into large-scale effects, producing *unforeseeable* consequences. Winston Churchill, for example, warned:

> Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realise that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

There is also what I call the "mediation butterfly effect," which seeks to weaken adversarial, aggressive resort to force or violence by strengthening people's sense of each other as human; or as Martin Buber put it, transforming 'you' into 'thou', and doing so on a scale that allows every mediator and conflict resolver to contribute to the development of collaborative peace building skills and capacities globally, focusing on peoples and countries that are moving toward war.

Indeed, this has already begun to happen in Russia, leading to a partial collapse of acquiescence by ordinary citizens in the war. Dismantling hostility and hatred in any conflict is not easy, yet mediators do it in small scale conflicts in countries around the world every day. At the level of nation-states, considerably more is required, including efforts to shift the ways of thinking and reacting to others that fuel war-like responses. Leo Tolstoy, for example, advised:

> To abolish war it is necessary to abolish patriotism, and to abolish patriotism it is necessary first to understand that it is an evil. Tell people that patriotism is bad and most will reply, "Yes, bad patriotism is bad, but mine is good patriotism."

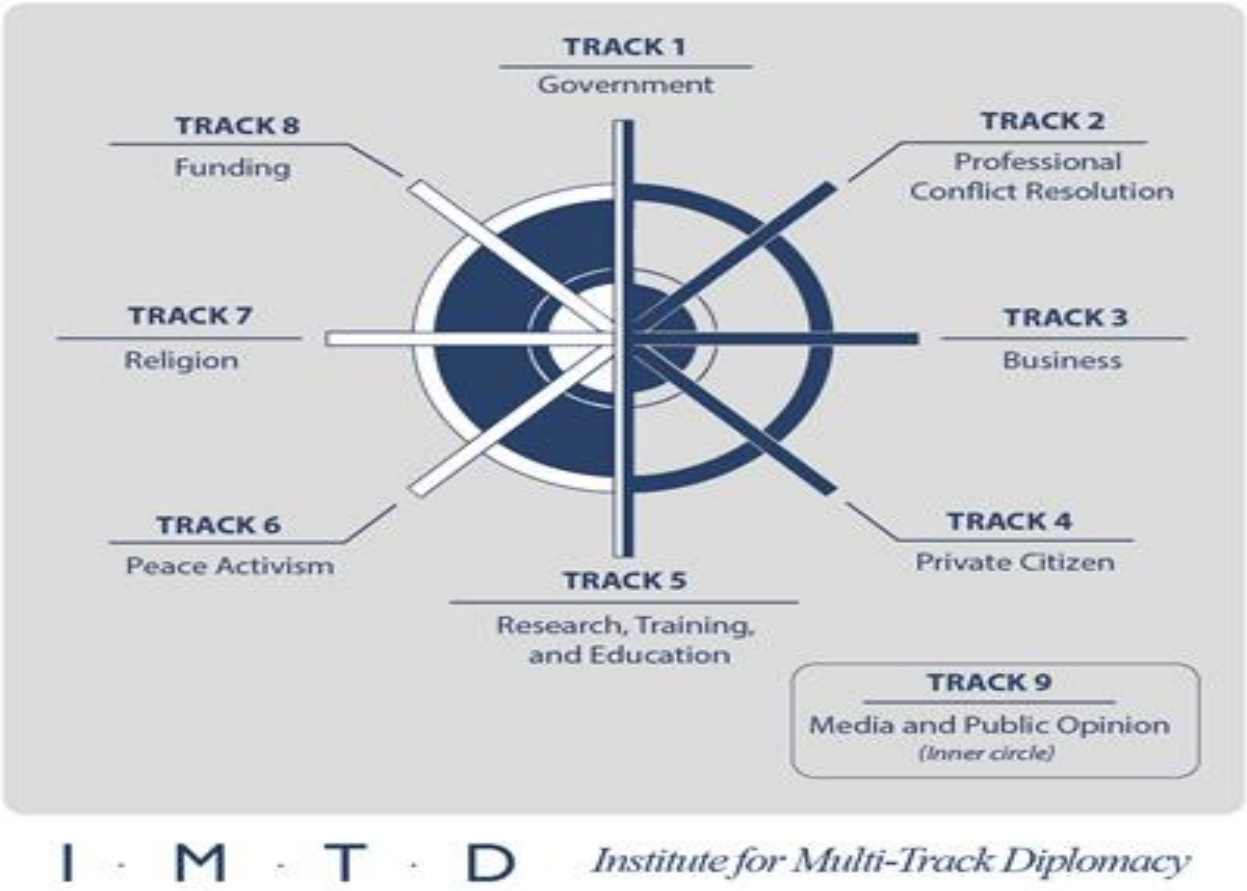
Perhaps what Tolstoy meant was not that people should not love their countries, but that they should not do so blindly, or violently, or aggressively, or in ways that do not allow others to love theirs. The famous cellist Pablo Casals expressed this idea beautifully: “The love of one’s country is a splendid thing. But why should love stop at the border?”

It is also possible for mediators to help end wars in advance by using media, the internet and similar sources to identify early warning signs, small shifts in language, micro-escalations, or the rapid spreading of hostile stereotypes, demonising stories and dehumanising narratives; by looking for subtle signs of softened resistance; facilitating dialogues; building consensus; solving problems; negotiating collaboratively and mediating, even on a person-to-person basis; and finally by designing interest-based global, regional and national early intervention conflict resolution systems that prioritise prevention and provide a rich array of methods for de-escalation.

A number of efforts are being made today to use artificial intelligence to model conditions in Ukraine and Russia and suggest negotiating points and creative approaches to problem solving. What is missing, in part, is a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary, *integrated* approach, using techniques like ‘single document/multiple draft’ that worked well in the past.

Former Ambassador John MacDonald, who pioneered the idea of ‘multi-track diplomacy’, emphasised the importance of Track 2 ‘back channel’ methods that enrol

conflict resolvers and non-state actors *directly* in de-escalating conflicts and co-ordinating with the other tracks. Here is an overview of the multi-track approach of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy:



Diverse, multi-track approaches seem to work best when teams are formed by first combining tracks 2 and 3, then building links to all the others. It would be possible, for example, for experienced professional mediators to work alongside international peace building organisations as 'shadow consultants' or assisting heads of state who offer to mediate. It would be possible to train civil society actors and organisations in

a range of de-escalation and conflict resolution skills, including facilitating dialogues, non-violent communication, restorative justice circles and similar methods. It would be possible to conduct 'trauma informed mediations' among vulnerable populations before, during and after negotiated cease-fires and settlements.

As mediators, we can also help people on both sides to understand the cultures, metaphors and subtle meanings that often go unmentioned, yet profoundly impact the ways parties behave in conflict. For example, we can ask questions like: 'What does Ukraine mean, or *stand for* in Russia?' and 'What does Russia mean or stand for in Ukraine?' These will not be on the table as negotiable items, yet Russia's rejection by the West and the West's rejection of Russia both have deep historical roots, hidden meanings and intense emotional significance in those countries.

Modern forms of war also reveal the importance for mediators of acknowledging the difficulties created by 'asymmetrical', 'cyber' and 'total' forms of warfare. This includes recognising power differences between the parties — not only in the numbers of troops and weapons, but in the fundamental *forms* of power and divergent ways the parties use them. It is especially important for mediators to pay attention to the parties' perceptions of powerlessness and disempowerment and to their consequent willingness to use forms of power that are deemed illegitimate, illegal or immoral by the other side. These complicate efforts by mediators to 'balance' power relationships and encourage collaborative forms of negotiation and problem solving.

More problematically, wars force mediators to examine the *trap* of neutrality, which can easily lead to complicity, condonation and implied permission to invade and attack others, as happened in Munich before World War II. Being unbiased, 'omni-partial', and on both parties' sides at the same time does *not* mean agreeing with their biases and prejudices, demands and positions, factual representations and legal assertions. Nor does it require us to condone violence, aggression, invasion, genocide, war crimes and similar acts. It is important for mediators to treat *people* with equal respect, but this does not mean equally respecting kindness and cruelty, fairness and bias, defense and invasion, freedom and slavery, dignity and contempt.

As mediators, we need to clarify that listening, empathising, emotional acknowledging and searching for understanding do *not* mean giving permission, justifying, rationalising, or condoning violence and aggression, but are instead *affirmations* of the *universal* principle of respectful communication, the value of unconditional kindness, the effectiveness of collaborative problem solving, the inclusiveness of restorative approaches to justice and the extension to *every* party in every mediation of these essential elements in peace building. Rather, they are efforts to stop the next war by dismantling the process of enemy-creation, identifying the legitimate underlying interests of all parties and redirecting their energies and attentions to collaborative problem solving.

Increasingly, solving global problems requires trans-national co-operation, which war, narrow nationalism and competition for global dominance undermine and obstruct.

Mediators then have two goals: first, to help stop wars, violence and aggression; and second, to encourage collaborative problem solving, dialogue, negotiation, truth and reconciliation, international mediation, and the principles of restorative justice.

Mediators in every country, at all levels of expertise, can contribute to both and help end this and future wars in *thousands* of rich and diverse ways — as, for example, by:

- Supporting their victims and refugees — not only with material, medical, and humanitarian assistance, but emotional support, expressions of solidarity, trauma services and reaching out in whatever ways we can,
- Continuing to listen to the *people* on both sides, and helping initiate, design, and facilitate dialogues, storytelling sessions, empathy building, restorative circles, living room conversations and similar exchanges, especially with people from 'the other side.
- Strengthening the United Nations, the European Forum for Restorative Justice, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and similar mediative organisations.
- Joining and actively participating in international mediation and peace building organisations like Mediators Beyond Borders and similar groups.
- Aiding, protecting, and assisting members of local mediation organisations in warring and conflicted countries and creating opportunities for them to connect, communicate and solve common problems.

- Advocating peace, ceasefire, dialogue, negotiation, and mediation — always and everywhere.
- Pointing out the hostile stereotypes, biases and prejudices that prepare the way for future violence and helping design and facilitate bias awareness and prejudice reduction processes.
- Respecting national differences, encouraging cultural diversity, and not assuming that 'our' ways, interests and factual truths are the only ones possible.
- Connecting in person and through social media with mediators and citizens of other countries, helping build their skills and capacities in conflict resolution and strengthening their conflict resolution 'cultures'.
- Seeking to reduce nuclear proliferation, 'Mutually Assured Destruction' (MAD), nuclear threats, political posturing, brinksmanship, war profiteering and preparations for aggression and genocide.
- Convening joint, collaborative problem-solving teams of professional mediators and negotiators from both sides to offer consensus-based suggestions and recommendations to the leaders on both sides.
- Speaking and writing in the languages of both countries about the power and effectiveness of a broad array of communication and conflict resolution processes, methodologies and techniques, including non-violent communication, appreciative inquiry, restorative circles, political and public policy mediation and many others.

- Setting up joint ‘blue ribbon’ commissions, mock peace negotiations, citizens’ assemblies, town hall meetings, war crimes tribunals, model truth and reconciliation commissions, online restorative circles and similar methods.

As mediators, we also need to continue our efforts to uncover the complex, hidden sources of war and violence in every conflict, large and small. For example: where and how do the lines get drawn that separate us irrevocably from one another, even for a moment, in any conflict? How can democratic nations, organisations and groups participate in principled ways in dialogues, collaborative negotiations, mediations and other forms of courageous, constructive, creative contention, alongside autocrats, dictators, militarists, chauvinists, neo-Nazis and armed opponents?

What are the limits of conflict resolution, and what are the sources of its hidden magic? If we cannot work directly, top-down, and from the inside out, how can we work indirectly, bottom-up, sideways, and from the outside in, so that the consensus and passive acquiescence to war in all countries begins to unravel?

How do we resist censorship, stereotyping, dehumanisation, demonisation, and the distortions of language that are an essential part of the ‘war building’ process? None of this will be easy and, as May Sarton reminds us: "Sometimes it is necessary to be a hero just in order to be an ordinary decent human being." Yet we need to begin, no matter how daunting or difficult the task.

Every defeat in every war is a tragedy, not merely for the nations, factions, and citizens of countries who have died or been conquered, but for *each* and *all* of us everywhere — and not just abstractly, but as the very real, very personal loss of humanity and caring, the crushing of hopes, the dismissal of dialogue and mediation, the brutalisation of language and culture, the freezing of imagination and possibility, the collapse of empathy and compassion, the inability to solve pressing problems and the closing of our hearts to others.

Mary Parker Follett, one of the founders of modern mediation, writing in the US in the 1910s and 20s, reminds us of the simple yet profound heroism and courage in every effort at peace building ad mediation:

> "We have thought of peace as passive and war as the active way of living. The opposite is true. War is not the most strenuous life. It is a kind of rest cure compared to the task of reconciling our differences... From War to Peace is not from the strenuous to the easy existence; it is from the futile to the effective, from the stagnant to the active, from the destructive to the creative way of life... The world will be regenerated by the people who rise above these passive ways and heroically seek, by whatever hardship, by whatever toil, the methods by which people can agree."

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Ken Cloke is a world-recognised mediator, dialogue facilitator, conflict resolution systems designer, teacher, public speaker, author of numerous books and articles and a pioneer and leader in the field of mediation and conflict resolution for the last 37 years. In 1983, *he* created the **Center for Dispute Resolution** in Santa Monica, CA. In 2006, he co-founded Mediators Beyond Borders which mobilises mediators around the world to support individuals, organisations, communities, and governments in building conflict resolution literacy and capacity in under-served communities.