

Ukraine: America In Search of a Good War

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Global Research, May 06, 2014

[War Is A Crime](#) 4 May 2014

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The U.S. public is not longing for a U.S. war in Ukraine.

Seven percent want military options considered (poll by McClatchy-Marist, April 7-10), up from six percent a bit earlier (Pew, March 20-23), or 12 percent for U.S. ground troops and 17 percent for air strikes (CNN, March 7-9).

Polling is similar on U.S. desire for a war with Iran, or for U.S. military involvement in Syria. Many more Americans believe in ghosts and UFOs, according to the polls, than believe that these would be good wars.

The U.S. public never got behind the war on Libya, and for years a majority has said that the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan never should have been launched.

The search for a good war is beginning to look as futile as the search for the mythical city of El Dorado. And yet that search remains our top public project.

The U.S. military swallows 55.2 percent of federal discretionary spending, according to the National Priorities Project. Televised U.S. sporting events thank members of the military for watching from 175 nations. U.S. aircraft carriers patrol the world's seas. U.S. drones buzz the skies of nations thousands of miles from our shores.

No other nation spends remotely comparable funds on militarism, and much of what the United States buys has no defensive purpose — unless “defense” is understood as deterrence or preemption or, indeed, aggression. As the world's number one supplier of weapons to other nations, ours may be said to extend its search for a good war beyond its own affairs as well.

A 2006 National Intelligence Estimate found that U.S. wars were generating anti-U.S. sentiment. Former military officials, including Stanley McChrystal, say drone strikes are producing more enemies than they are killing. A WIN/Gallup poll of 65 nations at the end of 2013 found the U.S. far ahead of any other as the nation people believed was the greatest threat to peace in the world.

It is the ethics of a coward to believe that safety justifies all, but of a fool to commit immoral acts that actually endanger oneself. And what is more immoral than modern wars, with deaths and injuries so massive, so one-sided, and so heavily civilian?

Military spending produces fewer jobs than spending on education or infrastructure, or even on tax cuts for working people, according to studies by the Political Economy Research Institute. It is the ethics of a sociopath to justify killing for economic gain, but of a fool to do

so for economic loss.

The military is our top consumer of petroleum and creator of superfund sites, in addition to being the hole into which we sink the funds that could address the real danger of climate change.

War justifies secrecy and the erosion of liberties: warrantless surveillance, lawless imprisonment, torture, and assassination, even as wars are marketed as defending “freedom.”

And of course the maintenance of nuclear and other weapons for war risks intentional or accidental catastrophe.

The downsides to war, even for an aggressor nation with overwhelming fire power, are voluminous. The upside would seem to be that if we keep fighting wars, one of them might turn out to be a good one.

But ask people to name a good war, and most will go back 73 years to World War II. A few will express badly misinformed views about Yugoslavia or Rwanda, but most will focus right in on Adolf Hitler. Think about that. Our top public project for the past three-quarters of a century has to go back that far to find a popular example of its use.

We live in a vastly changed world, and public opinion reflects that. The power of nonviolent action to resist tyranny and injustice is dramatically more realized, as is understanding of nonviolent conflict resolution and wise conflict avoidance.

Winston Churchill called World War II “the Unnecessary War” claiming that “there was never a war more easy to stop.” That war would not have happened without World War I, which nobody claims was itself unavoidable.

Just as the U.S. sells weapons to abusive nations today and prioritizes militarism over aid to refugees, Western nations helped fund the rise of the Nazis and refused to accept Jewish refugees. There are ways to prevent situations from ever reaching the point of war.

Or rather there would be if we weren’t so invested in the military industrial complex of whose “total influence” President Dwight Eisenhower warned.

David Swanson’s books include War No More: The Case for Abolition and projects include WorldBeyondWar.org.

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