

Arms are killing us twice

Alan Storkey calls us to disarm the world



Why Believe In The Power To Destroy?

Painting and photo credit: Alan Storkey

We lament the wars raging in Ukraine, Gaza, Yemen, Myanmar and now Lebanon as they bring death and destruction. Yet, perhaps we stop at the horror. Why do we not understand war? So much historical evidence is there – some 200 wars since 1900 and 200 million dead. They are not accidental, but repeatedly caused events. Why do wars happen?

Jesus' terse statement, *"Those who take the sword, die by the sword"* (Matt. 26:52) reverberates the answer. It is a general understanding in a particular situation. If you go for weapons, they kill you. It is a "Go Back Before It Is Too Late" statement. This route you must not go. Taking the sword always generates vast consequences.

This truth of Jesus goes to the heart of our present dilemmas. Arms lead to wars. We are taught "Defence" is good, stops wars, is necessary, guarantees peace, defends democracy and we accept it like zombies. The message is drummed into

us but actually the opposite is true. Arms have produced wars as clouds produce rain. Since about 1850 a vast industrial-military complex has armed the world competitively and arms have produced wars, first colonial wars, then other ones.

The First World War was four arms races: France vs Germany; Russia vs Germany; Britain vs Germany (naval) and Russia-Serbia vs Austro-Hungary. One spark at Sarajevo and all of Europe was at war.

Then there was World War Two. "Ah", people say, "but we needed to defend against Hitler" – but this ignores several important facts. First, the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1932 would have prevented Hitler coming to power if the Hoover proposals (to cutback armaments and outlaw tanks and bombers) had been voted through. When that failed, from 1933-39 there was a big expansion in arms production fuelling wars in China, Ethiopia, Spain and elsewhere. Then when Germany had few arms, the US armed Hitler large scale

with weapons and aircraft factories, even loaning him the funds to do so (which he never returned). Finally the Munich Agreement, signed by a fascist sympathizing British Cabinet in 1938, gave Hitler enough weapons to arm half the Reichswehr. Hitler was armed to fight World War Two.

The Cold War saw the US and USSR selling arms round the world, arming dozens of states, and generating dozens of wars, directly in Korea, Vietnam and Cuba and indirectly around the world. The Cold War ended, but arms sales marched on.

Arms generate wars. They send the world into new conflicts, enemy generation, tensions and destruction. Nuclear War remains a danger. Governments keep us asleep by saluting the flag or a Spitfire flypast and talking of dangers, so that the world's biggest problem can march on unchecked. "Defence" is mainly attack – missiles, nuclear subs, bombers, tanks and a vast range of offensive weapons. We now have 28 million troops training to fight, with perhaps \$10 trillion worth of weapons whose aim is destruction and mass murder. Perhaps we should rethink the long military road we are all marching down to destruction.

Then there is the ecological devastation. As well as the damage to ecosystems, militarism and war generate massive CO₂ emissions. They are obviously the opposite of green. It happens in four stages. First, weapons are made in the most energy intensive industry of all – missiles, fighters, bombers, tanks, battleships, submarines and explosives. Second, troops worldwide are kitted to use them – exercises, bases, fleet and troop movements burning more and contributing nothing to the world economy. Third, when wars arrive, energy consumption soars as warplanes, missiles, guns explode in pure CO₂ conflict; bombs tend to be energy intensive. Fourth the destruction occurs – wood, concrete, homes, infrastructure, burning oil and even solar panels. They all need *reconstruction* with yet more CO₂.

Military authorities have tried to hide this CO₂ account, because it is so big.¹ But we can do a "guesstimate". World military expenditure of GDP is near 2.5% and, given most jobs are service occupations, military energy use will be two or three times that – say 5% minimum. Serious war CO₂ pushes it up towards 10%. So here is the opportunity to save 6-10% of world CO₂ generation by full world disarmament and the end to war.

Ah, you noticed "full world disarmament". Of course, it is unthinkable, except when you think it. Then you realise it



Israeli soldiers guarding a barrier

Photo credit: Joel Carillet (iStock)

would save the world economy several trillion dollars – the GDP of India. Two big problems – war and global warming, meet in one solution – full world disarmament. The process is not difficult; you cut budgets/troops/weapons by 20% a year for five years with open inspection, and subsidize arms firms to repurpose. It is safe and becomes safer. We move to the system long used within most civilised nations – no weapons, policing and law. We do peace on earth.

The Superpowers cannot act. They are locked in their military dominance. The arms companies need war and stir it up. States, military dictators think might and do enemies. Armies must fight sooner or later. The media does fear and blind patriotism, and so ordinary world public opinion must be mobilised. Once it is rolling, it will not stop. Militarism and War have had the worst advertising on TV every day world-wide for the last two years, and the reality is that they have cost every family now on the planet around \$250,000 since 1900.²

Peace on earth is very popular. Could we heed the words of Jesus and stand up for full disarmament in a worldwide movement. There are two billion Christians; the key is the first million to get it on the world stage. Can we insist by faith on moving the mountain; each commit, stand and be counted until the UN does world disarmament and the Superpowers roll over.

You gently join the army that has no enemies and bring down the mighty from their thrones. We do as Jesus said and make peace, passing it on one to another, around the war-weary world for the healing of the nations.

change.org/DisarmTheWorld - please sign the petition ■



Dr Alan Storkey is a Christian social scientist working for the last 25 years on militarism and war. His books include *Jesus and Politics* (Baker Academic, 2005) *War or Peace?* (CSP, 2015) and *Militarism Has Failed: We Disarm the World* (CSP, 2023).

1 <https://theconversation.com/how-the-worlds-militaries-hide-their-huge-carbon-emissions-171466>

2 *Militarism has Failed: We Disarm the World*, Alan Storkey, Christian Studies Press, 2023