

## Editorial

# The disasters of war and the (un)human condition

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Humanity has always faced disasters, mainly due to extreme natural events. These expressions consist of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and meteorite strikes. In some cases, it can occur during long-lasting periods, marking human trajectory and causing large displacements of populations, as in the glacial era. In recent times, mainly since the industrial revolution, a succession of natural tragedies has occurred due to anthropogenic climate change from human activity on the natural environment. Climate science and empirical evidence show that the more the Amazon is devastated by fires and deforestation, the greater the effects on the dynamics of rains and droughts in other territories, with severe consequences for people.

Wars are also extreme events of anthropogenic nature. There is only one documented case of long-term “civil war” between other animals: “the four-year war” between wild chimpanzees. Paradoxically, the causes resemble human wars: the war began with a brutal attack on a chimpanzee by a rival group in 1974 in the Gombe National Park in Tanzania.

What is certain is that wars can decimate populations, cause material losses and exacerbate negative instincts that antagonize peoples. It is not by chance that religions point to anger, envy, greed, ambition as sins. In wars, humans’ express characteristics that distance us from humanity. Rivalries between social groups or people are as old as history. The first scene of Stanley Kubrick’s cinematic masterpiece, “2001 – A Space Odyssey” – depicts what may have been a war in prehistoric times. We see hominids fighting and discovering a weapon (in this case, a large bone) that allowed one of the groups to overcome the other and, metaphorically, mark human evolution. The mastery of the use of fire has also been portrayed as a triggering factor for conflicts, as in the film “Quest for Fire”, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud, based on the novel “*La Guerre du feu*”, by J.-H. Rosny ainé. Since then, weapons have evolved a lot, and so have wars, making the possibility of asymmetries between parties in conflict also grow.

The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 led Japan to surrender and marked the end of World War II. However, they also marked a new phase of what a war can represent: people and things destruction and the extermination of populations, the annihilation of human works, and the devastation of the habitat and conditions of survival of the species, including the human. Chemical and nuclear wars can lead to a paroxysm of what we understand as destruction and devastation, both in intensity and on a territorial scale. Humans have come together to look for ways to regulate wars<sup>1</sup>, as paradoxical as this may sound. However, such initiatives did not eliminate wars and did not prevent the so-called Cold War from persisting for so many decades, nor to restrain war crimes.

Today’s world has the technological conditions (war artefacts) to self-destruct. This can serve as a shield against using such resources, even for the simple instinct of survival. Unfortunately, human instincts do not always lead to rational decisions.

As Carl von Clausewitz said, “War is a mere continuation of politics by other means”. This is how we see, in another masterful film by the same Kubrick – “Doctor Strangelove” – the case of an insane political leader who triggers the mechanism that launches an apocalyptic nuclear device.

Regardless of the level of destruction achieved by the evolution of war artefacts, we must register that every war represents a regression of civilization and an advance of barbarism.

Although much has been said and written about the effects of wars on people and their environment, the notion of sustainability, which was enshrined in the Brundtland Report 35 years ago, raises the level of warnings to a new level: wars are far more devastating than the immediate material and human tragedy; they endanger Life (with a capital L). Furthermore, for this reason, the Brundtland Report devoted its chapter 11 to discussing the interactions between Peace, Security, Development and the Environment. Besides, Chapter 12 points towards common actions. It calls for fighting poverty, maintaining peace and security worldwide, and managing the global commons. All nations have a role to play in ensuring peace, changing trends and fixing an international economic system.

War does not just mean loss of life, destruction of families, breakdown of society. It also destroys territories and economies, squanders natural resources, contaminates the air, water and soil, and requires reconstruction investments. The great Spanish artist Francisco de Goya left us a legacy of 82 prints ("The Disasters of War"), which depict the horrors of war. The set of images from 1810 to 1815 gives us an exhaustive overview of the cruelty and tragedy people live in such context. However, in his dramatic representation of war situations, nature was a background element. In his work, "The Natural Contract", Michel Serres draws attention precisely to this invisible "actor" in Goya's engravings. War scenes also devastate the natural world! Moreover, today, this is happening on an ever-increasing scale.

Today, we can understand the great interdependence between the natural world and the social environment. This interdependence also unites populations and regions in the same global nest.

Therefore, we signal that the global commitments around the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda suffered a hard setback with the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine: a setback that does not impact only Ukraine, but the effects of the war on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also dramatic. We feel the effects of the setback in the SDG targets worldwide.

We also want to remember the commitment that nations signed when approving, at the United Nations General Assembly, the period between 2019 and 2028 as the Nelson Mandela Decade of Peace, in honour of the South African leader's centenary. All Member States committed to redoubling their efforts to pursue international peace and security, development and human rights in the Decade. Therefore, contradictorily, amid the International Decade of Peace, we are witnessing the beginning of yet another war between nations.

We must also remember that 2021 corresponded to the International Year of Peace and Trust, which ended just over 30 days after the formal start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The efforts of international organizations to ensure peace need to be more valued. Perhaps these approved indications of a Commemorative Decade and International Year referring to world peace were already a foreshadowing of the fear of war.

Sustainability in Debate – SiD cannot ignore the tragic situation in Ukraine, invaded by Russian troops. We are in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and are concerned about the human, material, and environmental effects of the conflict. It is a serious threat to basic principles of humanity, such as liberty, free will, security, human rights, and society's integrity. It is also a huge risk to the environment and sustainability.

We received a letter from three Ukrainian researchers ("The situation in Ukraine, the consequences of the war for Ukrainian society, science development and sustainability") who recently published an article in SiD<sup>2</sup>. They express their repudiation of the war and present relevant information, which we believe to be of interest to our readers. Therefore, we publish it, regardless of war duration or outcome, on the date of publication of this issue.

In its first issue of 2022, SiD publishes a Dossier on the “Environmental Impact Assessment, its faces and interfaces”, with seven articles and four others in the *Varia* section.

In the Dossier, Brandão and Gallardo discuss the proposal implications for a new licensing framework on assessing the impact of water supply and sewage systems, where the withdrawal of the licensing requirement is being planned. Next, Alves, Nascimento and Fonseca present the experience of municipalities that have taken on the environmental licensing of projects with local impact within the state of Minas Gerais until December 2020. Oliveira and Malvestio evaluate the proposals for regulation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in Brazil in the light of the elements that make up a SEA system. Duarte, Souza and Santos explore three potential SEA contributions, as adopted in French water management, for the case of the Development and Environmental Protection Plan (PDPA Portuguese acronym) of the Billings Reservoir sub-basin. Veronez, Estevam and Almeida present an analysis of the screening of the Environmental Licensing (EL) of Hydroelectric Power Plants in Espírito Santo State, comparing them with other states. Xavier, Caetano and Brannstrom evaluate the application of participatory methodologies in the construction of data on fishing activity, aiming to analyze potential impacts of offshore wind farms in the marine territories of Ceará with a focus on artisanal fishing. Furthermore, Veronez, Lima and Tshibangu present a guide for identifying the environmental impacts of hydroelectric projects.

In the *Varia* section, Souza, Castilho and Macedo discuss the institutional framework for Bioinputs in Brazilian agriculture. Oliveira-Neto, Alves and Schwartz analyze the benefits of agroforestry systems associated with natural regeneration in Pará. Pacheco, Azevedo-Ramos and Nakano assess, also in Pará, the perception of stakeholders on the autonomy of traditional communities to carry out community forest management for timber in two federal conservation units. Finally, Viglio and Ferreira present an assessment of the performance of experts from the Public Ministry in the environmental licensing of the Mexilhão Project in São Paulo.

We hope you enjoy the reading!

## NOTES

1 | UN General Assembly Resolution: A/RES/3102 (XXVIII). Respect for human rights in armed conflicts. 12 December 1973.

2 | Bilyk, O.; Karkovska, V.; Khim, M. Gender budgeting: a vital element for ensuring sustainable development. **Sustainability in Debate**, v. 12, n. 3, p. 305-323, 2021. Available in: <https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/sust/article/view/38824/32256>