

## THE NEXUS BETWEEN CRIME AND WAR: THE PREMISES FOR UNDERSTANDING THEIR INTRICATE RELATION

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**Abstract:** *Although there was almost always a war going on somewhere on the planet, Europe has known relatively peaceful times, since the end of the World War II. All this period, in Europe, we have mainly seen crime (in its different shapes) as a main menace to societal prosperity. However, a war has the potential to produce considerably more profound effects. This is why it seems important to analyse the relation between crime and war, to see how these two factors interact, to see if they influence each other, and, if possible, to find out if there are common traits in addressing both issues. This paper analyses the relation between crime and war, starting from the observation that both crime and war have a deep impact on societies. In our quest, we will take into account different perspectives on crime and war. As regards crime and, at a larger scale, organised crime, often fighting against them has been deemed as a true war, and this adds a new dimension to the nexus between crime and war. We will analyse as well if there is a variation in the type and number of certain crimes in times of war. Overall, in this paper we will try to clarify some aspects regarding the nexus between crime and war, as a clear image on their relation is extremely important in order to identify some methods which can be used to prevent or, at least, to mitigate the effects of these two seriously impairing factors.*

**Keywords** *crime, war, World War II, organised crime, war on drugs.*

### The Necessity to Make a Comparison Between Crime and War

After World War II, with few exceptions, Europe has known peaceful times. All this period, the main menace for individuals has been represented by crime, in its various shapes. However, we can never take for granted the idea that humanity has learned from its past mistakes and that bad things will not happen again. This is why we must pay attention to something that a large part of the Europeans considered to be long-forgotten: large-scale armed conflicts, or, in a simple word, war. Among all confused feelings and thoughts which arise towards war, we emphasize the need to understand the nature of war, regarding the structure of the menace it represents to people. Somehow, war is a kind of crime, or at least the actions which define war, taken individually, are some sort of crimes. However, war has another “texture” than “simple” crime. All the components of war lead to such a conclusion: its huge scale, its cruelty, its victims caused indiscriminately, the power of the weapons being used, the dimension of the damage it causes, its social and political implications, the persistence in time of its consequences and so on. In order to understand war, it is useful to draw comparison between war and something which is better known for people who have not directly known war, namely crime.

We emphasize the fact that our quest is inspired by our belief that, in order to prevent crime and large-scale armed conflicts, we must have a good understanding of their causes and their effects. For this, history provides us, for sure, with the right tools in order

to reach pertinent conclusions. It depends on us if we want to apply or not these conclusions, in order to bring a significant contribution to preventing crime and war.

We can argue that crime can also be seen as a type of war, as between the various meanings of the word “war” we find that “war” also means “any situation in which there is strong competition between opposing sides or a great fight against something harmful” (Cambridge Business English Dictionary, 2011). And what is crime, if not a battle between people’s rights and those who want to break them, a battle between good and evil, a battle against the extraordinary harm caused by those who do not respect societal rules?

Given the above-mentioned, it is obvious that between war and crime there is a strong connection. Both seriously influence the existence of a climate where people can develop a normal life. The difference between them resides mainly in the scale of their consequences. Generally, war affects more than one people or a small group of people, while crime usually affects one or a few people. However, this is not always the case, because it is possible that war affects only a small number of people, while a certain crime can have consequences on a large number of people. For example, we can imagine a situation when a war is declared between two countries and it only lasts for a few days and actually no person is killed or injured and no severe damage occurs. At the same time, we can imagine a situation when a person commits murder over a large number of people (for example, in a terrorist attack or in another context). In these examples, the “classical” image of war and crime is altered, but this does not change the category where we include these two activities, although each of them seems to bear the characteristics of the activities generally included in the other category.

Another interesting approach refers to determining what effect does war have on crime. In other words, we should try to see how crime varies in times of war. This quest has criminological implications, because it reveals the criminogenic factors which act in peaceful times, but no longer act during war.

It results that war and crime have enough similarities and connections that it is worth to analyse them in relation with each other. In the following lines, we will try to explore the premises of the nexus between war and crime and see what conclusions we can draw. Mainly, our interest is focused on finding possible ways to prevent these two phenomena or, at least, to mitigate their impact, although we acknowledge that their scale is too big to be able to easily find solutions, especially regarding these two issues, which humanity has constantly tried to prevent. But the fact that no absolute solution has yet been found means that it is still place for further research. This is why we want to undergo this study, which explores the intricate relation between crime and war. We specify that we do not intend to exhaust the subject, at its huge dimension cannot be comprised in a single paper. This is why we will not take into consideration some aspects regarding the connection between war and crime, for example war crimes. In this paper, we will try to understand some basic elements which define the nexus between crime and war.

### **How Crime Varies in Times of War. A Historical Approach**

As we have pointed out before, one of the connections between war and crime which should be analysed refers to the effect that war has on the so-called “ordinary” crime. The best way we can do such a study is to see how real wars influenced crime. This means that we are looking for statistical information, which contains the data we need.

We have found such information in a study made in the United States of America during World War II (Sellin, 1946). This study shows that, in that time-frame, in the United States of America, generally, crime rate decreased. An exception refers to crimes against life. The explanation for such a situation resides in the fact that a great number of men (especially young men) had been conscripted into the army. As the perpetrators were mainly a part of this category of population, the lower number of young men in the United States of America has naturally led to a smaller number of crimes. The above-mentioned study shows that, in the United States of America, before World War II, over 90% of crimes had been committed by men, especially young men, aged 18-35 years old. In the World War II, it is estimated that about ten million young men from the United States of America have been recruited in the army, with a maximum age of 45 years old. This means that there were fewer circumstances in which they could commit the usual crimes.

As regards the men who stayed at home, they were mainly involved in economic activities, as there was a shortage of labour force, especially in the fields where men were usually employed. This means that these men managed to obtain a decent salary, which provided them a good economic situation. The result was that there were fewer crimes against property (as economic precarity is an important factor for this kind of crimes). The economic prosperity has led, though, to an increase in the number of crimes against life, mainly committed under the influence of alcohol. This was due to the fact that men had enough money to buy alcohol (Sellin, 1946). Also, there has been an increase in the number of crimes related to black market, as black market supplied population with products which were hard to find, like different categories of food, fuel or alcohol. The committing of crimes related to black market ceased after war (Sellin, 1946).

As regards the number of crimes committed by women in the United States of America during World War II, in the study it is mentioned that there is not enough data in order to reach a relevant conclusion indicating if it varied. However, the authors of the study emphasize that it is possible that the crimes committed by women increased. This could have been a consequence of the new role that women played in society, including in the economic field, as they had been employed in great number in war plants and other factories, in order to replace the men who were in the army. This led to a change of the “classical” role of women and this had the potential to put women in situations where they could have been involved in criminal activities (Sellin, 1946).

World War II has brought in an increase in juvenile delinquency in the United States of America. The main cause was that children did no longer benefit from the supervision of their fathers or other male relatives, who could have prevented them from involving in illegal activities. As regards the mothers, as we have shown before, they were forced to seek for work in factories or to do other activities in order to obtain money to raise their children; this led to the decrease of their possibilities to supervise the activities of their children. Another cause for the increase in juvenile delinquency comes from the fact that many children left school and worked in factories, where they gained decent wages (Sellin, 1946). This gave children a sort of independence, which encouraged them to involve in activities which emphasised their feeling of *maturity* they have reached, including illegal activities. The data shows an increase in juvenile delinquency for both boys and girls, with the number of boys committing delinquency being about four times higher than the number of girls. It is important to mention that the data takes into account not only the children who actually committed delinquent acts, but also those who were

considered being *at risk* for this kind of activities. An explanation for the quite high number of girls registered as juvenile delinquents is the fact that public opinion reacted toward the sexual behaviour of girls, which was considered scandalous (Sellin, 1946). It is possible that the war context has drawn society's attention towards actions which would have not been considered so serious in peaceful times. As we have pointed out in another paper, it seems that, when societies pass through some sort of crisis (and war is, for sure, a kind of crisis), it appears the tendency to cling on to moral principles, understood in a very strict sense (Frant, 2013).

Overall, it is pointed out that war brings a major psychological shift for population, with people experiencing attitudes which are almost opposed to those met in peaceful times. In war, citizens are urged to make a great effort, while they are asked to accept all sorts of shortages and restrictions (Bromberg, 1943). Also, they are stimulated to bring out an aggressive behaviour, while in peace people are required to inhibit aggressiveness. For example, in the United States of America, during World War II, the slogan "Pay Your Taxes, Smash the Axis" was being used in order to stimulate citizens to financially contribute to war efforts (Bromberg, 1943). War brings people an acute perception of the ephemerality of life, which makes them decrease their interest for things and activities which are normal in peaceful times, like childcare. The menace of war takes over people's minds, making them less responsible. This lack of the sense of responsibility is even more severe in young people, which is a cause for the increase of juvenile delinquency during war (Bromberg, 1943; Sellin, 1946).

The information presented above refers only to the situation in the United States of America, during World War II. But, although the United States of America was a country actively involved in the war, which had a decisive influence, its situation is sensible different than that of other countries, because the war did not take place on the territory of the United States of America (with few exceptions, namely Pearl Harbour in Hawaii and the territories of Guam, the Philippines, Kiska and Attu in the Aleutian Island of Alaska, and Wake Atoll - Domenech, 2020). This means that the impact of the war on civilians, although great, was *different in nature* than the impact which war had on civilians who actually lived from one day to another under the direct threat of being killed or injured. Also, the specific situation in the United States of America made it possible for analysts to gather information and make statistical analyses on crime. In countries where the war was being fought, the concern for immediate vital necessities made it hard for specialists to focus on making such studies. However, we have found a study which analyses crime rates in London, comparing the dates regarding the crimes reported to the police for the years 1938 and 1940. This study shows the same pattern observed in the United States of America, namely a drop of crime rate in war-time (Bromberg, 1943).

### **The War on Crime: Can the Word "War" Have Positive Meanings?**

The word "war", as we have shown above, is generally seen as indicating a destructive phenomenon, which fundamentally changes the principles upon which society normally functions. However, the word "war" does not always have a negative connotation. For example, if a person is said to have declared war on his or her alcohol addiction, "war" is seen here as positive. At a larger scale, it has been declared "war on drugs", in an international campaign, launched by Richard Nixon, then the president of the United States

of America, in 1971 (Nixon, 1971). For sure, at a first glance, in the “war on drugs” syntagma, the word “war” has positive implications. Indeed, the “war on drugs” campaign has begun fiercely, and it was aimed at annihilating drug abuse, which has been declared, at that time, the public enemy number one (Niesen, 2011).

But after over fifty years since declaring “war on drugs”, it seems that this campaign is far from reaching its goal. In a bold assertion from 2011, The Global Commission on Drug Policy stated: “The global war on drugs has failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world” (The Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2011). We have made an analysis of the impact of this ascertainment in another paper (Frant, 2021). The negative consequences of the “war on drugs” campaign have been more and more talked about (Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2012, 2013, 2015). It is pointed out that the majority of specialists which have analysed the “war on drugs” campaign agree that the drug policies adopted according to this campaign have failed (Ferreira, 2015). Also, it is emphasized the fact that officials have been aware of the failure of the “war on drugs”, but they have hidden the truth. This has been possible through misinformation, as the statal authorities have presented only some minor achievements in the “war on drugs”, creating the false image that the whole campaign was a success (Ferreira, 2015). This approach contributed to maintaining the public and political support for this disastrous campaign, which has deepened its negative effects.

It results that, as regards the “war on drugs”, even if it has been created the context for using the word “war” with a positive connotation, even if states have invested huge resources in order to present this “war” as a good one, the “war on drugs” campaign proved to be rather bad than good. This means that, in what concerns the syntagma “war on drugs”, the word “war” cannot receive an overall positive connotation.

Indeed, it seems that, no matter the goal of a war, despite its sometime noble purpose, a negative meaning will always be attached to the word “war”, although it may have, at the same time, some positive implications. This is because, whether it is a competition between opposing sides or a great fight against something harmful, war bears inside its core the imminence of destruction, sufferance, sacrifice and death. Even if the final goal is worth the sacrifice, the negative companions of war make it an undesirable situation.

However, conflicts are, sometime, inevitable. Between society and crime, between society and organised crime, there is, undoubtedly, a conflict, which can be denominated as war. Although we have shown that war has always a negative connotation, this does not mean that we must be passive in front of the menaces of all sorts that threat people and, generally, the society. Perpetrators must be caught and punished. There must be done activities with the aim of dismantling organised crime. And all these come with a risk.

We believe that the syntagma “war on drugs” is not bad by itself. Here, the word “war” is used to express the belief that something should be done, at all costs, in order to solve the drug issue. The path which was chosen in 1971 to solve the drug issue is a reflection of the general way of thinking which prevailed in society at that time. We believe that some attitudes, like tolerance and compassion for those who were addicted to drugs, were unacceptable in that era. To sustain this idea, it is enough to mention that, in the United States of America, women of colour could exercise their right to vote only beginning with the year 1965, when the Voting Rights Act has been enforced (Yang, 2020). This is why we believe that the problem is not that people decided to take attitude against drugs. They

did it in the only way they knew at that time, meaning with no empathy for people with drug addiction. The problem is that people did not understand sooner that the “traditional” ways are not efficient in fighting against drugs and that other methods must be used.

## Conclusions

Without doubt, crime and war have an intricate relation, bearing similarities and sharing common circumstances and consequences. Of course, they have their own specific traits, but, as we have seen, they are often perceived as being related. Through this study, we only wanted to understand the premises that sustain the idea that crime and war are, somehow, connected. And, indeed, we have pointed out that war can be seen as a complex and giant form of crime and crime can be seen as a smaller war. We have shown that crime has different forms and different scale in times of war than in peaceful times. Also, we have seen that, even in peace, people do not hesitate to engage in some kind of a war, apparently perceived as a positive one, namely the “war on drugs” or the “war on crime”.

Many aspects are yet to be analysed in regard to the relation between crime and war. For example, it is interesting to see what effects do civil wars have on crime or how organised crime can lead to civil wars or how can organised crime influence public policies, including public policies on war. Also, it is useful to understand how the “war on crime” can be carried on, in order to be efficient. Understanding how crime is used to finance war is also an important goal in analysing crime and war together. Moreover, it would be useful to see how we can approach crime and war, in order to prevent their occurrence. We hope to be able to analyse these aspects in the future.

This paper opens the door for further research on the nexus between crime and war, by revealing the premises of their connection. Indeed, these two major threats to the human society are related, just like two evil allies. However, their strong connection can also be one of their weaknesses, and this is why it is important to understand the mechanisms that lie at the base of the intricate relation between crime and war.

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