

WAR STARTS HERE

More than twenty years have passed since the last direct experiences of war in our region, yet they remain inscribed in the daily lives of millions, and entire societies are still held hostage to the forces and ideas that plunged them into the dance of destruction. Mass graves, memorial complexes, family memories of tragedies, bones without names, names without bones, all point uneasily to the question: when will war come to us again? Despite the cries of "Never again!", the possibility that the generals of the military superpowers, in collaboration with their local underlings and subcontractors, may once again unleash a new slaughter in our own localities, maybe as a part of the larger-scale conflict ominously foreshadowed by the war in Ukraine, is becoming more and more palpable.

But even if everything in our little corner of the world remains as we have been used to for some time, war is not far away. In some parts of the world, such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Palestine/Israel, war, ethnic cleansing and even genocide have become so commonplace that they often no longer even constitute a news. Indifference to these tragedies leads to their repetition - in new or familiar geographies. By recognizing the crimes that occur "far away" as logical, inevitable, even "normal for those places", we - influenced by media coverage - overlook the real reasons for the continuation and reappearance of the horrors of war.

All the wars mentioned and others that remain unmentioned are our wars. Not only the weapons with which they are being fought have often been developed and produced with the money we contribute through taxes to the budgets of the states and supranational formations in the framework of which we live. These are our wars also because we live in a world that is fundamentally determined by their consequences. They determine the price of food, fuel, the possibilities of travel, opportunities for cultural exchange, the formation of personal contacts and, last but not least, they determine the topics of public discourse, the mood of society, the rhetoric and the posture of local authorities. These wars affect whether we, as a society and as communities, are able to treat the future as something we build together or as something that hangs over our heads like a sword of Damocles on an ever thinner thread, and in relation to which we can only imagine change in one direction.

When it comes to war and the political and social structures that go with it, apparent paradoxes are crystal clear. To mention just the most obvious: while in the countless meetings of the official forums of the authorities scaremongering about migration as the main problem of the so-called West

is ever-present, the same authorities divert huge amounts of public money into the arms industry. The latter is wringing its hands over the lucrative deals it is making - often under the auspices of the European Union - all over the world. When these weapons are then used in actual conflicts that bring untold destruction to life, nature and social structures, many people are forced to look elsewhere for a life outside war. They become migrants, refugees. They are then hunted at the borders of the "free" world and within them by security apparatus stocked with often very similar products by the same weapon-dealers that played the big role in forcing people to leave their homes in the first place. On the back of this developments the structures that are originally responsible for investing in the arms industry seeking reproduction of their political power spread fear and hatred towards the uprooted people who thus, for the second time, become the targets of the arms industry. The circle is thus complete, benefiting only a small circle of the elite, while the vast majority receive only death, persecution, oppression or, at best, a feeling of growing insecurity and disorientation in a world that is disintegrating.

Arms or war capital and its loyal servants live perfectly well off this apparent contradiction. For them, every war is a confirmation that everything is perfectly fine, since more war means more investment in the war industry, more weapons, more devastation, more need for security, more post-conflict reconstruction and renovation, more structural adjustment programmes, more undermining of the structures of social solidarity, more privatisation, less trade union organising, and less regulation in the name of protection of human and workers' rights, and of protecting nature and the environment. Every rifle, pistol, tank, combat simulator, guided anti-aircraft missile, infantry mine made and sold is a knot from which the authorities claim to weave a web of supposed security, but in reality what they do is to constantly breed danger, instability, turmoil, which each time richly rewards those who prove to be the most loyal subjects of the death machine. Yet, even if it often seems all-embracing, uncontrollable and, consequently, all-powerful, it is up to each one of us to do what we can to stop this machine once and for all. The first step in this process is to accept the fundamental understanding that war is not a natural catastrophe or a necessity, but a choice of the few imposed on the majority through a combination of direct violence and intimidation.

Notwithstanding official declarations and carefully prepared publicity campaigns, the European Union and NATO, of which Slovenia is a member, are key structures that provide a stable environment for the transfer of untold amounts of public money into the complex and often hidden meanders of the arms industry. Indirectly, through the development of high technology, many universities, institutes and other supposedly reputable research institutions often play their part in the murderous process as well. The list of players involved in the war industry is extensive, even in

the small country that Slovenia is. Each of their even minimal involvement in the clusters, groupings or sets of the local defence industry is a piece of the puzzle of the global death machine. For all the above reasons, we can say that the wars that we - bring horrified or indifferent about it - watch through our screens are also starting here. What follows is a sampling of three local war profiteering establishments, which form a small, but representative, piece of the aforementioned jigsaw.

War is not a simulation

Let's start with the segment of the war business that can currently count on the best PR. The concept of "WarGame" is highly popularised in modern warfare. The experience of war and warfare is increasingly being transferred from real life to virtual models. In the latter, combat itself loses its physical dimension, the opponents are no longer living human beings from flesh-and-blood, but sets of data points. The experience of simulated war game and real war, where real people are being killed, real buildings destroyed and very real nature contaminated, has to many soldier-murderers become practically identical. It is well known that this is true for drone operators, but it is increasingly true for many other combat personnel. From the point of view of soldiers war is increasingly becoming a computer-modelled battle, in which those engaged in violence may in fact be continents removed from the weapons they operate, their actions and the consequences of those actions. The evolution of the war industry continues to move intensively in the direction of abstracting warfare into the form of a computer game, where the direct realistic confrontation with violence, blood, death is disproportionately limited to those that end up as casualties.

Part of this segment of the war industry is **Guardiaris**, a company based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, which produces computer simulations of various forms of warfare. Soldiers are trained in the use of light weapons, mortars, anti-tank weapons, artillery, armoured vehicles and portable air defence systems. The company prides itself on being a partner of a number of global arms companies, and its instructors and staff come from military schools such as the notorious US West Point. Guardiaris has ambitions that its simulators would be used to train NATO-affiliated armies and to some extent this is probably already a reality. For example, as part of the intensive lobbying for this deal, a large delegation of more than 70 people from the NATO Modelling and Simulation Group visited the company in May 2023.

Guardiaris prides itself on the fact that its simulators offer a completely authentic combat experience. Equipped with replicas of real weapons, the budding soldier operates in a terrain framed by large curved screens with a 300 degree viewing angle, while various sensors and interfaces

ensure the most authentic simulation possible. These include tracking the soldier's gaze and monitoring his/her brain activity in real time. If the screens, the sound, the shaking of the ground give the budding soldiers the feeling of being on a real battlefield, the data collected allows their bosses to measure stress levels, eye movement and much more. The ultimate goal of the Guardianis simulation is to turn people into killing machines capable of action, i.e. killing, in the real world. So what for Guardianis is a simulation and a game is for many a sentence to death or mutilation.

Production of weapons is not a value

In addition to war simulations, Slovenia-based companies also produce heavy-category weapons. **Valhalla Turrets** is a company with a telling name that almost invisibly exists and produces in our vicinity. It produces so-called medium-range battle stations. It is a weapon that can be used in a fight against armoured and other armed and unarmed vehicles, as well as low-flying aerial vehicles. On 7 June 2023, the company, together with other domestic players, signed a contract with the Minister of Defence, Marjan Šarec, for the "Mangart 25" project, for which the state has allocated a "paltry" € 4.914.450 [almost 5 million €]. It is a "research, development and innovation" project that will be a "game changer" in the field of air defence and could put Slovenia on the map of successful arms producers. This air defence system is essentially just another cannon with more accurate targeting and a supposedly greater ability to destroy targets.

The company is based above one of Ljubljana's kindergartens and can pride itself on working with a major European arms manufacturer such as Rheinmetall, as well as with the defence industry in Russia and the United Arab Emirates. There may indeed be a front line separating 'ours' and 'theirs' in this business, but there is certainly a profit made from death that unites them. During one of his media appearances the director of Valhalla expressed the hope to see an end to the stigmatisation of the arms industry, and that he hopes to see that many young people willing to play a part in such a development land jobs in it - undoubtedly richly subsidised by public funds. The director's desire to see an ethical turn in society indicates that in Slovenia for the time being public opinion is still quite reluctant to accept that this type of production would be something normal and acceptable.

Stop the traffickers in violence and death

When we talk about the military industry and about militarism in general, we should not limit our gaze just to the army and war, rather we should turn our attention to the police as well. For years we have seen on the streets of our cities how police equipment has become more and more militarised, to the point where today it can almost be possible to say that the only difference between a special police unit and an army unit is the colour of the uniform. In many parts of the world it is much

worse than that and the distinction between the army and the police, between military and police operations, is getting smaller and smaller. Weapons, methods, concepts and approaches that were once reserved for the army are increasingly finding their way into police units.

We should take seriously the words of Branko Grims, who in a rare flash of truthfulness, said that during the epidemic of the Covid-19 virus Slovenia, "finally got a real European police force". There is much truth in this as in that period the police had upgraded their arsenal, developed further a taste for violent action even on the most banal grounds, and reinforced a culture of impunity and hooliganism. New weapons (rubber bullets), new tactics (faster use of intervention platoons, routine use of chemical weapons, use of large vehicles to push people away), increased levels and frequency of violence, routine abuse of power, organised untouchability, illegal submission to the wishes of political godfathers, etc.

The merging of these two executive branches of the state's monopoly on violence is also reflected in the investment deals of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence. For example, both are partners in the economic-interest association Cluster of the Defence Industry of Slovenia, which presents itself as "an interest association of companies providing products and services in the field of defence, security and safety", which is just another name for the domestic arms industry lobby. Among the successful dealers in arms and other equipment for both bodies is **Group 22**, a company specialising in the supply of defence products and "law enforcement." They are also proud to extend their arms dealing activities to all the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo. When they list the items supplied to the army and the police, they - interestingly - both claim to be providing the equipment for 'maintenance of law and order'. In full compliance with the legislation, the army is also equipped and prepared at all times in case of activation of Article 37a of the Law on Defence, under which the army acquires the power to carry out repressive tasks against the civilian population. At least two contracts from the period of the last government, worth just under €2.5 million, with Group 22, are easily publicly accessible on the web. Of this, half of the public money was spent on arms deals by the Ministry of Defence and the other half by the Ministry of Interior. Given that the Slovenian police get new combat clothing and other toys almost every year, there are probably many more deals and the numbers are much higher.

Wars around the world also start in Slovenia

The genocide in Gaza, the murders in the Mediterranean Sea that go on for years already as well as in the Kolpa in Dragonja and all the other wars that are currently taking place around the world oblige

us to finally speak out about what exists in our environment, what is being produced, for whom and with whose money. It is time to finally put the companies that trade in violence and death under the public scrutiny and to confront them with calls for them to stop their horrific activities. The war industry is not a 'normal business' and should not be understood and accepted as such. War is not something that comes naturally and never just breaks out. Indeed, those who benefit from them often need to go to considerable lengths to create the conditions in which it becomes possible. On the one hand, a war needs a widespread system of values, with nationalism, patriarchal social structures, exclusive religious affiliations, racism at its centre. On the other hand, it needs purely material conditions, raw materials, companies that produce everything that is needed to build a weapon. Today, that does not only mean steel and special chemicals, but also huge quantities of software code, chips and other high technology. Just as every training for war is already a contribution to making war possible, so is every tonne of steel purposely produced for a weapon, and so is every line of code written for the purpose of simulating war.

As long as there are factories in our cities, next to our kindergartens and in our neighbourhoods, that develop components for weapons, assemble weapons and train people to use them, then the war will start here as well. As long as there are training grounds for the army in our towns and cities, the war starts here. As long as our public educational and research institutions willingly place their personnel at the disposal of the death machine for research purposes, the war will start here too. As long as political decision-makers continue to devote huge resources to the army, the police and other structures of organised violence, the war will start here.

Wars start here and we must stop them here!

We join the anarchist call for a global week of action against war from 17th to 25th November 2023, which was formulated at the St-Imier gathering in July this year. As part of this, we have carried out communication interventions in front of the headquarters or production facilities of three companies operating in Ljubljana. Enough of weapons production!

Stop training for war!

No war, give us peace!

Stop the genocide in Gaza!

Abolish the conditions of war!

Initiative against militarism

25th November 2023