

## Is War a Racket? David Collins Friday 21<sup>st</sup> April at 'THE BIG ONE'

"War is a Racket" was the title of a speech given in 1933 by former US Major General Smedley Butler who served with distinction in the 1st World War.

He said – "War is a racket – it always has been . It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable and surely the most vicious. It is the only one in which profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives. And what are these losses: new graveyards, mangled bodies, shattered minds, broken hearts and homes, depression and all its attendant miseries, back breaking taxation for generations and generations".

In my youth I served in the Royal Marines and my speech is not intended as a criticism of serving men and women. We need sound defence, however we do not need the aggressive foreign policies and negligent diplomacy which have resulted in a series of futile and catastrophic interventions and wars since WW2.

Smedley lists the US manufacturing companies and their gargantuan increases in profits (and I mean profits not turnover) – 200% to 1000% became normalised – creating a vast inter- generational debt.

Have matters changed today? Who is dying? Who makes the profits? Could they possibly be as large today? Does the prospect of huge profits increase the likelihood of war and divert resources from planetary well-being?

I looked at an article this month in the Financial Times entitled **"There's Money in Defence"** which stated that the values of international Exchanged Traded Funds (ETFs) with over 40% defence content increased by 65% in the 59 days between the end of January 2022 and the end of March the same year, showing clearly that speculators bet in advance on the war happening (on 24<sup>th</sup> February) and cashed in when it did. If annualised that would be over 400%. Then as several previously neutral countries applied to join NATO, the FT reported that a new defence ETF had been launched on the London Stock Exchange last month. Previously there had been reluctance amongst major companies and institutions in Europe to be seen to profit directly from war. Meanwhile British Aerospace, the defence firm, was the FTSE 100's biggest riser in 2022 doubling in price and hitting a record high last week as the share price nudged over the £10 mark.

Lower down the feeding chain, what fortuitous timing for the annual International Armoured Vehicles Event in January this year held at the Rugby Football Union sports ground and HQ in Twickenham. In a letter to their CEO on behalf of MAW I wrote "You may recall that last year I pointed out that

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international arms companies such as UralVagonZavod of Russia were involved in arms trading at your stadium, and of course it turns out that the event that you just hosted was the final international arms event before the devastating attack by Russia on Ukraine. Perhaps you might now take time to reflect that facilitating arms sales is not a neutral act; it implicates your organisation in the business of killing and maiming the innocent in every part of the world; are you really content that this is a proper use of an arena dedicated to youth, health and fun and the right message for the promotion of rugby to young people?" My request for a meeting was ignored.

If these profits are being made by manufacturers of weapons, it may be asked why not, since this is how most businesses in a market economy behave. But war is not normal business, as this quote from a Marine home from the Falklands war states - *"The job is killing, which of course is murder in any other context in life. In itself it is immoral and pointless, therefore it can only be justified if there is no other option. If a war is caused by neglect, then the killing which follows is wrong"*.

It is still the same story - countless thousands of the young who are sent to die by leaders who have created, intentionally or by neglect or ignorance, the policies that create conflict and later call upon our patriotic instincts to endorse more conflict.

According to Andrew Feinstein's book "Shadow World" the Arms trade accounts for 40% of all corruption in global trade. The trade is circular, morally blind and most arms contain components from multiple countries. UK has sold over 1.5Bn of military technology to Russia since 2010.

Russia has and is carrying out savage illegal and unforgiveable war crimes in its invasion of Ukraine but is the dying and destruction in Ukraine so very different from that of other recent conflicts? The world outside Europe has not forgotten nor recovered from the NATO invasions of Iran, Afghanistan, the war in Yemen and in so many other parts of the world? Can you compare Bucha in Ukraine, with the total destruction of Falluja in Iraq or the historic quarter of Mosul? Or in Yemen where British arms and expertise have kept that brutal war going for over 7 years and given rise to a new medical condition called Human Devastation Syndrome which describes the level of PTSD severity suffered by children who have seen the shredded remains of their mum or dad, blown apart by bombs, cruise missiles, or airstrikes.

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Britain's response to these disasters is to launch a major expansion in planned military and naval activity. Known as 'persistent global engagement' the 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, increased the UK nuclear stockpile by over 40% at the expense of a massive cut in its' overseas aid budget. The deployment of the Royal Navy's new Carrier Strike Group within a huge US naval exercise in the South China Sea in 2021 was a manifestation of a new aggressive projection of British power across the world.

Yet the UK International Climate Finance scheme (ICF), administered by 4 UK government Departments, directly contradicts this strategy and rightly states on the current government website that *"Investing our climate finance today helps reduce costs tomorrow. Every £1 invested well in climate-related risk reduction saves more than £3 (and up to £50) in avoided disaster impacts. Similarly, every pound spent cutting CO<sub>2</sub> pays for itself between five- and twenty-fold by offsetting the future costs of climate change"*

These schemes to slow and reverse climate change, represent overwhelmingly better value for money than a securitised military approach that seeks to address only the symptoms of a changing climate in the form of increasing conflict across the Global South. And yes there are good UK sponsored current initiative such as Blue Forests Programme – Mangrove restoration – Madagascar and several others.

However, UK and global efforts to tackle climate change actually stalled in 2022. The Climate Change Committee summed up its verdict as "Climate Change has arrived - yet the country is still strikingly unprepared" and that there is "scant evidence of delivery against the nation's 'Net Zero' goals".

Whilst UK stalls ,other countries nearby are running credible programmes. For example the 'Water, Peace, & Security Partnership' (WPS) based in Holland states - *"We want to positively influence communities and stakeholders, both at national- and county level, to find sustainable solutions to prevent and resolve water-related conflicts.*

But who is paying for these bonanzas which are generated by arms orders placed by governments for shipment to Ukraine and to support the huge increases in defence spending. It seems that it is you and I. Every basic service worker asking for a salary linked to inflation is now said to be unaffordable. Nurses are paying, junior doctors are paying, teachers are paying. Local Authorities budgets are not sufficient to fulfil their social responsibilities. Other

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vital public service workers too. They and others have been subsidising extravagant defence spending for many years. Who has ever heard a government say that this war or this aircraft carrier is unaffordable? The government is unable to do so whilst it continues to be part of NATO and the cornerstone ally of US military strategy. US General & President Dwight D. Eisenhower advised: "We will bankrupt ourselves in the vain search for absolute security - War settles nothing".

How do we get our own youth to join up? Britain has not conscripted its soldiers since 1963, which is why it recruits boys and girls of 12 to join one of 1,700 government sponsored Cadet Corps detachments all over the country. At 15 years and 7 months they can commit to join as a regular army soldier for entry at the age of 16. I would like to bet that almost every one of those young people is joining, yes for adventure, but also because they believe that force can be used for good against those destructive elements in the world. I did – we were going to "keep the peace".

Was General Smedley right to call war "A Racket" – it was certainly a crude description but then it was and is the only business in which profits are reckoned in cash and the losses in the legalised murder of soldiers, civilians, children, and above all the potential destruction of our planet.

Last word from General Eisenhower in 1945 was:

"I think that people want peace so much that one of these days government had better get out of their way and let them have it."

Yes it seems it **IS** up to us, the people.