*“An unpopular musing on sending weapons to Ukraine”*

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine last February, I have argued multiple times with friends and relatives about the merits of sending weapons to the Ukrainian army. In fact, I happened to have a most unpopular opinion at the time: I was in favor of doing it. While I think the issue is to be regarded in a completely different light now (it’s been many months since the beginning of the conflict and it would actually be time to make some evaluation regarding the weapons Ukraine was supplied with and if they made any positive difference at all), I believe that at the time there were many aspects of the issue that were not taken into consideration. These were our main discussion points.

First of all, I disregarded the theory that sending weapons to an invaded country would benefit the interests of certain countries' traffics. Not because it’s not true, but because it’s beside the point: we were not talking about a civil war or a situation of extreme institutional instability (like the one in Yemen, for example), that a constant weapons supply would help prolong. We were dealing with a freshly invaded country, that could be given a chance to repel the invading troops. Moreover, just because a party benefits from a situation, that does not mean that the situation has been conjured up by that party: there is no causal link between the two facts. This is the basis of conspiratorial thinking and it has been debunked many times. If sending weapons to Ukraine is the right thing to do, it is so whether a country benefits from it or not.

That said, we could argue about the necessity of sending weapons from two angles: the practical one and/or the ethical one. I feel the first one is the easier to illustrate: we had an emergency situation, where many thousands of people, a lot of them civilians, were risking being killed. Weapons could be as much a means for protection as they were for striking back. We have been told for years how much Russia has invested in its military department and in fact many expected this operation to be quite short-lived, a replay of the annexation of the Crimea region. I think Ukraine's surprising resistance is to be attributed to many factors, the first of which are the incredibly cohesive reaction of hostility from the population and the nerves of steel of the president Volodymyr Zelens'kyj, acting as a pillar of unity and strength. But I do believe that the weapons that were supplied were crucial too.

Another consideration from a practical point of view came from one of the core beliefs in the main theories of international relations: usually a negotiation can only occur when the two parties in conflict have comparable force. Only when a country perceives the other as an equal and thus believes it can gain more by diplomatic means than use of force, a real negotiation is possible. Paradoxically, supplying Ukraine with weapons could help balancing the forces on the field and make a peaceful resolution happen faster.

However, the most neglected aspect of the issue, I thought at the time, was the ethical one. Besides a few truly stimulating contributions (especially some articles by Vito Mancuso in *La Stampa*), I found that people around me pretty much acted as if this angle of the matter didn’t exist or didn’t deserve to be explored at all. I guess the mere implication that sending weapons that were meant to be used immediately could be a positive, ethical act sounded repulsive at first. As it should be. In an ideal world, we wouldn’t need weapons at all. But that’s why I think it’s important to separate prescriptive considerations from descriptive ones.

As Mahatma Gandhi himself argued, if people witness an act of violence performed on someone else, they have the moral obligation to stop it, even by using violence themselves. The perspective on the use of violence changes when it’s applied to a situation of self-defense, which is exactly the predicament Ukrainians found themselves in. Incidentally, Gandhi also argued that the justified use of violence in self-defense must be a personal choice and a considerable number of Ukrainians asked to be given the chance at least to defend themselves.

I think the final removal of weapons and war from this world is an ideal that needs to be protected and nurtured, not treated as if already a reality. It’s supposed to guide the way people think and behave to strive to be the best version of themselves, given the circumstances. Unfortunately, until even one man is willing to use violence, others may need to be protected by the use of violence themselves. In fact, I believe public opinion has a fundamental role to play in this scenario: it’s up to us to remind those in charge of the limits they need to abide by. It’s society’s duty to monitor how many weapons are to be sent, how they are used and when it may be time to stop.

Ultimately, I believe the best way to muse on this kind of profoundly delicate issue is to always apply some counter-intuitive thinking: would the situation really have been better and more secure if we had decided not to send weapons to Ukraine?

Excellent!