

# Social Aggravations during the Period of Medieval Wars in Europe

Nurmukhambetov Ardak

**Abstract**—This article makes an attempt to disclose the dynamics of development of social interactions in an aggravated environment in relation to the distinctive features of religious wars and their negative impact to the society. Crisis situations that took place in all spheres of social life are described, on the grounds of which the author comes to specific conclusions.

**Keywords**—War, medieval period, social relations, nation, Europe.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**M**EDIEVAL wars in Europe cause a significant interest due to the fact, that the most topical aspects, requiring thorough studying prevail. Those wars grow bigger by means of interference of various states into them and stress an unfavorable impact to the social situation and social order. The mentioned subject does not lose its topicality as of today also, causing ambiguous opinions of scholars which researched the history of medieval wars in various aspects and tried to disclose their political, economical and spiritual contents. In our view it seems critically important to give an evaluation regarding the negative impact of those wars to social relations. The goal of this article is to disclose how medieval social interactions in Europe developed and how they aggravated throughout prolonged wars. Also the goal is to demonstrate some peculiarities of medieval wars and how they resulted in formation of crisis situation, which stressed a negative influence to the society.

## II. THE MAIN PART

It is known that the interests of one country may not always fully comply with the interests of another state; therefore the collision of interests and principles in many cases grows into a bloodshed war, while resolving the problem by means of bloodshed should be considered as a cruel and unjustified method. Military actions that took place on various stages of history of the whole humanity were not always effective for resolving the socio-political problems. So, the downsides of military actions were most vividly manifested in medieval Europe, the reasons of which is closely related to the multiple wars, that became an integral part of life of the society and the inadequate understanding that “war is robbery against local inhabitants” that widely spread among soldiers. Therefore, in minds of both medieval warriors and common inhabitants

Nurmukhambetov Ardak is with the Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan (phone: 8777548-09-49; e-mail: nur.ardak\_83@mail.ru).

being able of using the weapons the opinion formed, that by means of war it is possible to enhance one's socio-economical state. It is doubtless, that medieval wars, that occurred namely on the grounds of such a mercantile understanding stimulated creation of a number of unfavorable conditions, one of manifestations of which is a negative impact of military actions to social conditions. There is plenty of reasons of growth of military conflicts, and one of them was explained by Carl von Clausewitz, a famous theoretician, that studied the essence of military collisions. So, in his words “the war is just a continuation of politics by other means” [1]. Medieval military actions showed that an important role is played by economical and religious factors. Indeed, disputes and controversies for strategically important regions were always directed towards political and economical interests. Actions, related with the striving to obtain a leading status at the certain territory, in many cases resulted in wars. The famous theoretician, that studied the phenomenon of war, wrote the following in that: “War is the science, full of haziness, not allowing us to move confidently. There is routine and prejudice in its basics” [2]. Such definition of war is considered to be correct, as long as it is impossible to plan the course of military actions itself and to foresee the period of their completion. Until the final goal is reached and the tasks are implemented, the military actions will last. It is easy to notice from the historical experience that formed throughout many centuries, which was characteristic for all war, occurring in various periods of history, at this also different wars in many cases have stressed only the negative impact to the society.

Meanwhile, the historical science is aware of viewpoints, according to which impact of military collisions to the society was bearing some other impact. For instance, according to Roger Osborne, peaceful life was considered as very dangerous for any medieval state as long as in the conditions of peaceful coexistence society weakens and its spiritual potential decreases, while the war mobilizes forces and activates the social life. Besides, by the opinion of the scholar, war creates favorable conditions for manifesting all warrior qualities and spiritual strength by young combatants [3]. In our view this is a unilateral subjective opinion, not disclosing the essence of the matter. One can agree that the war experience, accumulated by the humanity, gave a birth to several talented military leaders, personal abilities of which facilitated appearance of newest tactics of conducting the military actions and of modern samples of military weapons and ammunition. Also, the art of military leadership transits to the next stage of its development. Moreover, the war or

annexation policy of the state was considered to be an efficient way of filling in the state treasury. By means of annexation of natural resources and of large trading regions bringing the enormous profits, namely, large states fill in their treasury, therefore, heads of medieval states tried, first of all to increase their armies. Together with the professional qualification of warriors their number was one of the main factors on which the result of war was dependant. For instance, if in 1470 Spanish armed forces consisted of 20 thousand soldiers, then in 30s of 17th century their number reached 300 thousand. If France in 1550s had an army of 50 thousand, then, in dynamics of its development this country became a state that had an army of 150 thousand in 1630 and the one of 300 thousand and in 1700s. [3]. Meanwhile, a desire to justify all military actions seems to be quite an erroneous task, as long as it is necessary to take into account, that the war not only improves the level of martial art and unites the society, but stresses a negative impact to the social state.

Due to internal instability in many medieval states social relations were formed in complicate conditions. The majority of society was forced to live in the conditions of unquestioned subordination to the heads, which is vividly manifested in political, economical and spiritual life of the society. Relations between the common people and the authorities facilitate revelation of the main indicators of social environment. Social inequalities, taking place in peaceful life, during the war started growing stronger. During the war social relations were subject to social risks, which lead to conflict situation. It is certain, that consequences of any war and social aggravations during the war are assessed, first of all, through human casualties. Collisions between opponents were especially strongly felt in strategically meaningful regions, therefore on such territories, which were, in essence, the main arena for military actions, bloodsheds took place, leading to large-scale consequences, as a result of which human casualties in such regions were much greater. It is necessary to take into account the fact, that inhabitants of some places at the territory of which military actions took place, in order to survive, had to escape to other peaceful places, searching for peaceful life. For instance, during the 30-year war in Europe in 1618–1648 a significant damage was inflicted to the Northern and Central parts of Germany. Mecklenburg, Brandenburg and Magdeburg, as well as Palatinate and Saxony were forced not only to face all hardships of war, but its consequences as well. Number of people, inhabiting Germany during the period of war, according to data of some sources was 15-17 million, according data of other sources – 21 million of people, and after the end of war the size of population of this country was fluctuating between 10 and 13 million. [4]. Meanwhile, according to other data, size of population of North-Eastern and South-Western parts of Germany have decreased by 50% and more [5]. Despite of many statistical data, revealing an accurate number of human casualties is considered to be a complicated problem. At this is seemed, that some regions at the territory of heavily populated Germany, as a result of war

turned to one whole deserted land. For example, there are data, that only one tenth of inhabitants of Palatinate, located on the shore of Rhine, have survived [6]. Size of population of Mecklenburg after the war decreased by 80%. For instance, if right before the war size of population was 200-250 thousand, then right after the war only 40-45 thousand people remained. Another example could be drawn – out of 400 thousand people residing in the Wurttemberg dukedom during first years of war, finally, only 50 thousand survived. Together with this population of Augsburg have significantly decreased, with only 16 thousand surviving out of 80 thousand, and out of 6.5 thousand population of Liebenberg and Silesia only 40 people survived. According the data of researches of recent years the total population of rural areas decreased approximately by 40%, and the city population fell by 33%. In order to prevent the demographic downturn of population the Catholic Church has started to undertake measures, directed at improvement of demographic situation. For instance, peasants were allowed to have two wives. Besides that, one could give himself to serving to church only after he reached the age of 60, which was the compulsory condition for congregation. [7]. In our view, the negative impact of war to the demographic situation was the main indicator of social unrest, as long as in order to compensate for demographic downturn and to bring it in a pre-war state several generations need to change, which took centuries. In regions, that became the main epicenter of military actions the demographic crisis was felt especially acutely. Such manifestations were characteristic not only for 30-year war, but also to various wars, that occurred at different stages of history, and they all made a negative impact to human resources.

The main difficulties and consequences of military actions during various periods of history of humanity, including the medieval period as a whole, were taken by the common people. To the war, that was funded by people themselves soldiers were draught from common people. There are no major or minor wars, all military actions have their complications, therefore, to become a soldier, in order not only to fight, but also to endanger your life is not a simple decision. Moreover, even those soldiers that went to medieval armies with a goal of getting large amounts of money were forced to make such a step. Maurice of Saxony indicates three main kinds of soldier draughts, which are: forced decision, willful decision and draught by means of deception [2]. At this the author does not provide any data on mercenaries, while during the medieval period the states at war were widely using the experience of mercenaries for resolving the disputes and conflict situations. Actions of such soldiers, for whom monetary reward was more valuable, than state interests and social values, at war in many cases led to aggravation of social relations. In case if the issue of monetary reward was not resolved in favor of mercenaries, they started to do sheer robbery of local inhabitants. Such actions were widely spread during the medieval period and became a habitual occupation; therefore the history of any medieval war is full of events that

were accompanied by robbery and brigandism. Besides soldiers, who “believed, that the main goal of the war is robbery against local population and achieving material wealth”, the number of military readers, thinking the same of the essence of war started to grow. Medieval people used the war in their selfish goals, gaining revenue on it, and for many of them this became the main occupation. This means, that the intent of medieval soldiers and other people to use the war with the purpose of easy monetary gain, firmly penetrated their consciousness. Of course, men, able of using weapons, were receiving monetary reward when serving as mercenaries, and thus provided for their families, but in case of non-timely payment of money, people residing in the direct proximity to the military actions were a subject to robbery and brigandism from the side of soldiers, who, on their own will joined the army, and, instead of showing heroism in the battle, pursued to rob the peaceful people. Such negative manifestations were the consequences of distrust of soldiers towards their leaders. Not having the opportunity of receiving the earned money on time, the soldiers tried to make the maximum use of wealth of others. Of course, this shows low moral qualities of not only the soldiers, but of their leaders also. Various measures of punishment, embedding fear into souls, started to be applied frequently, in order to get hold of personal belongings of people without barriers. So, together with a hanging and severing the body of an alive person, other ways of torturing the human started to be used. Unlawful takeover of crop produce by soldiers was not inspiring people to do ranching and farming. Such unfavorable circumstances at war only made social aggravations worse, as the result of which life conditions of people decreased and all kinds of economical activity, being the basis of social welfare, underwent a crisis. For instance, Mansfeld, one of the authoritative military leaders of Europe of the beginning of 17th century widely applied in his military squads the experience of paying to the army by means of robbing the local inhabitants [6]. The army of Mansfeld, which was defeated in the Battle of Höchst on June 20, 1622, became disengaged; soldiers could not unite for the common cause and started to do robberies and brigands [8]. In turn, Mansfeld legalized such actions of soldiers, believing that robbing the population is an effective system of maintaining the army. In fact, in order to retain soldiers, large funds are necessary, therefore many medieval military leaders attempted to resolve this problem by means of robbing the population. Nevertheless, such resolution of the problem should be understood as a primitive and wild way, contradicting the moral norms. In such conditions the dynamics of international trade has decreased significantly, due to which money devalued, that resulted into growth of military conflicts at the territory of Europe. Such economical instability during the period of war was characteristic not only to Europe, but to other regions, engaged in war also. Military actions mobilized medieval states and population of regions to military life, adapting to which acquired the status of social order. Doubtlessly, military actions require enormous funding, that's why robbed people were forced to pay taxes to the state,

in order to cover the losses of war. Of course, paying the established taxes in the conditions of peaceful life is believed to be lawful and traditional, but collecting large taxes from people to compensate for losses of war stresses a negative impact to the social state of people. Taxation is one of the main means of filling in the state treasury, the volume of which increases several times during the war, at the same time excessive increase of tax sizes leads to neglected state of socio-economical conditions and to decrease of demand from goods. Certainly, this, in turn, hugely impacted the medieval production enterprises and the owners of farms, and such a troublesome state was vividly seen in the regions, that became epicenters of military actions, and in comparison with the regions, where there were no military actions, the economical conditions were in the state of downturn – the cattle breeding decreased and the volume of uncultivated lands grew. As it was said above, in the regions, where military actions took place, the population decreased sharply, therefore the lack of labor force was acutely felt there. One can justifiably suppose that military actions made socio-economical state of certain region fall behind. For instance, within 30-year war the cities of Nördlingen, Augsburg and Nuremberg, located at the territory of Germany, incurred large losses in producing leather and cotton, which derived them of reputation in the market [3].

During the medieval wars some political and also other unresolved problems acquired a regional scale, because such each state prefers to resolve such regional problems while observing its own interests. Late medieval heads of such states as Denmark and Sweden tried to establish its superiority at Baltic seashore [9]. As a consequence of the fact, that different interests, protected by different states, could not come to common resolution, at this increasing the social tension and inflicting a serious damage to all factors, making a direct impact on social stability. Among them there are: disruption of order of work on large trading seaports, robbery, brigandism at trade paths, etc.

Any war not only brings material damage to the humanity, but also makes peculiar changes in the worldview of an individual. The main problem was that people had their value perceptions of life completely changed. A widespread opinion that the war is an integral part of society allowed to take military actions for a normal and lawful situation. As a result of medieval wars the cities, that were large cultural centers started to be destroyed, which negatively influenced development of spiritual life. Destruction of cities as a result of military actions made a negative impact to development of human potential and to its cultural enhancement – this all should be considered as the consequence of war. It is undisputed, that during every war aggression of people, being a subject to robbery and brigandism from the side of soldiers grows, and for peaceful inhabitants it didn't matter who's interests were protected by soldiers fight on battlefields. People, facing humiliation and insults from the side of opponent forces, did not care about this problem, they, in turn, after battles, were ruthlessly robbing, killing and punishing

soldiers of defeated side, moreover, the situation was complicated to the extent that the facts of cannibalism were registered. Military actions became a reason for creation of such negative circumstances. Together with such macro-factorial circumstances, medieval military actions made an unfavorable impact to the quality of life and safety of family as a part of society and to separate social groups of people. The especially strong factor to be seen was the influence of interethnic cultural transmission to formation of the national traits, as the result of which the national idea, with the purpose of preservation and re-birth of the nation has appeared. At this the main goal was to form the national spirit and to preserve national values.

Worsening of socio-economical state of opponent sides during the war and the severe life of peoples residing at some certain territories that became battlefields speeded up the end of war. In turn, ending of the war made a favorable impact to development of social relations. Results of war brought about the peculiar changes into the development of social relations, and the Westphalia peace treaty could be named as a specific example [10]. One of main reasons for signing this treaty was prevention of social aggravations that arouse due to military actions. Westphalia Peace was based on independent national statehood, due to which many states have gained independence, at the same time Western Europe have formed a new system of international relations. In our view, at the present time a special significance should be given to that system, as long as, according to the opinion of the majority of researches, as the result of this treaty namely the modern system of international relations was formed [11]. This means, that the conclusion can be made, that the result of such contradictions leads to formation of the new social consensus and of new progressive ideas.

### III. CONCLUSION

It will not be erroneous to state, that the whole history of humanity was full of various wars and conflicts, and many problems between various states could not be resolved peacefully and grew into wars. Based on historical data provided in this article, the conclusion can be made, that the war is the aggregate of actions, increasing the social tensions to the maximum. In our view, such definitions are characteristic for all wars that occurred in different historical periods. We believe that the problem of medieval years, in which various interests of different states intersected, has to be reconsidered and rethought by scholars on the grounds of social research. By means of studying and disclosure of essence of social relations during the war, via revealing negative and positive impacts of war to interethnic relations and to members of various social groups, it is possible to make specific conclusions on this problem.

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**Ardak Nurmukhambetov** was born on August 16, 1983. In 2006 graduated from the university with a specialization in History. In 2008 defended a Master's degree thesis in Kazakh National University (Republic of Kazakhstan) and was awarded a degree of Master of History.

Author work as a lecturer in the university and actively write articles on history of medieval Europe, some of which were published in Kazakhstan, Russia, Poland and Bulgaria.

He is a member of public association of historians of Kazakhstan.