



New challenges, new responses

PR. FRANÇOIS HEISBOURG

SENIOR ADVISOR FOR EUROPE AT THE
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES,
MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF STAND
SPEAK RISE UP!

War and its horrors evolve over time. It is a dark mirror that reflects the broader cultural, political and technological evolution of human societies.

In the three decades since the end of the Cold War, conflict has most often been between non-state actors. **Wars opposing conventional state forces have become the exception.** Al Qaeda, DAECH, Interahamwe, M23 are just a few of the non-state groups that have found themselves in the spotlight from their use of ultra-violence to achieve their goals. Where states have been involved, they have often operated in a mercenary mode, outsourcing violence. The Wagner group is a recent and glaring example. Whether as booty, revenge or as part of a project of domination and extermination, sexual violence has been and remains a key element of the conflicts of this period.

Sadly, these wars are far from over.

The worst news is that **'classic' state-on-state wars between relatively equal armies are back, and with a vigour.** Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not only the biggest conventional war in Europe since the Second World War. It is also an ideological and ethnocidal war, as Ukraine is not considered by the Kremlin to be a people, a nation nor a state. The same ingredients as the ultra-violence of jihadist wars have been combined with levels of force and technology that allow for greater levels of destruction and coercion. This booklet contains stories that bear witness to the level of horror. No consideration of age, gender or status seems to limit the sexual cruelty on display since this invasion began on 24 February 2022.

This dramatic change means that **we must quickly strengthen the political and legal instruments** to address the atrocities uncovered in Ukraine, including sexual violence in wartime. The punishment of those who committed these atrocities following Russia's invasion of Ukraine must be exemplary, not only in the interests of justice but also to deter future violence.

« No consideration
of age, gender or
status seems to
limit the sexual
cruelty on display »