Quest for Peace & Social Mechanisms for Safeguarding it

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Abstract

The world has yet to evolve a coherent theory of peace. As health is commonly understood as the absence of disease, peace is broadly conceived as the absence of war. This is a negative ideal that merely eschews physical violence rather than replacing the urge for aggression with a positive and self-existent sense of security. It addresses the visible symptoms but neglects the essential reality that constitutes the foundations for lasting peace, social stability and security. So too, insufficient attention is given to the essential role played by war and violence in the evolution of the human community from small, isolated units into larger national and regional entities now in the process of converging into a single global community. The emergence of the modern nation-state over the past few centuries has largely pushed violence and war from the domestic domain into the sphere of international relations. This shift reached a peak during the Cold War when every nation sought protection from external security threats. We are now in the midst of a further stage in social evolution to forge a single global community in which violence is no longer regarded as a legitimate means for exercise of power, either domestically or internationally. But the essential conditions for peace and security still elude us at all levels. Security remains under threat from sources at all levels—excluded, disadvantaged, oppressed individuals; insecure nation-states; and the absence of an inclusive global cooperative security system. But the most pressing sources of threat now beset humanity as a whole in the form of COVID-19, the climate emergency, the resurgence of competitive nationalism and the nuclear arms race, rising inequality and aggravated cultural tensions. This article examines the relationship between peace, violence, warfare and the evolution of the human community in its age-old quest to safeguard the peace and security of all human beings.

The quest for peace and ways to safeguard society is one of humanity's oldest and deepest aspirations. Our greatest successes and persistent failures are reflections of contradictory elements in human personality and society that both support and frustrate its realization. We normally understand peace as a safeguard against war with foreign powers. But this is a narrowly limited conception. Historically, domestic social violence and oppression have often proved a thing to be feared as much or more than external aggression. Until the evolution and maturation of the nation-state over the last few centuries, internal conflict has been a persistent threat and powerful impetus for the consolidation of centralized power and national identity. Today internal threat persists in the widening inequalities and disparities between classes and communities. A historical perspective of the threats to peace compels us

to view with skepticism short-term solutions that fail to address the essential conditions for permanent stability, security and progressive social evolution.

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Society has long been divided into rich and poor sections. Until recent times, those divisions were often accepted as inevitable or even necessary expressions of the inherent differences between people and accepted without question or protest. Caste inequalities in India were accepted as a natural part of social organization until social reformers such as Mahatma Gandhi started questioning such an arrangement and awakened among the depressed castes a feeling of injustice and oppression. Once awakened the depressed population started clamoring for social equality and lifting of social restrictions. After achieving independence in 1947, the Government of India outlawed untouchability and lifted restrictions on lower caste people, such as prohibitions against visiting temples, taking water from village wells and taking up residence within towns, etc. These timely initiatives helped prevent an explosion of uncontrollable rioting throughout the country which would have had catastrophic consequences for the nascent Indian polity.

Absolutist monarchy and a feudal regime divided into nobles and serfs attached to the lord and his manor may have played a salutary role in supporting a stable society of local fiefdoms in Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire, but they contained inherently destabilizing factors which prevented peace from enduring for a long time. As Europe developed, local kingdoms merged from more centralized absolutist monarchies and feudal regimes that prevailed until the end of the 18th century when the French Revolution broke out protesting against the royalist and aristocratic injustices. The clamor for democracy spread gradually from then onwards undermining royalist regimes through much of Europe. One of the last to go was the Russian Czar who failed to read the changing social attitudes of the people and as a result was forcibly removed from power and physically liquidated.

Revolutionary thinkers such as Karl Marx gave a new economic dimension to class war by showing that the working class was being exploited by the capitalist class and was doomed to be overthrown by the former in the long run. European capitalist countries did not heed his warning much and instead adopted coercive measures to control the spread of Communism. But the threat of class war became very real after the Bolsheviks managed to overthrow the Russian emperor and install their own Communist regime in Russia. Fearing that the scourge would soon spread to other vulnerable countries, many European countries adopted socialist measures and extended concessions to the working class such as 8 hours of work per day, freedom to form labor unions, right to pension and right to strike, etc. The US, which was the acme of capitalism, also awoke to the danger of the spreading menace due to rising

unemployment during the Great Depression and took efforts to humanize capitalism through institution of the New Deal social welfare programs. After WWII, all of Western Europe adopted social democratic policies to quell the spread of communism more and succeeded in offering more attractive benefits to the working class than the Soviet model.

Equally disruptive to peace has been the notion of racial pride which became a force and justification for extreme violence in Germany during the Nazi era. Writers such as Arthur de Gobineau promoted the theory of Aryan Master race which captivated the imagination of Nazi leaders. Hitler advanced the concept to include the right to subjugate and dominate people, using his demagogic power to galvanize large sections of the German population into believing that they were a master race destined to rule over inferior populations. His overconfidence emboldened him to even attack the Soviet Union, believing that the Russian Slavs were subhuman beings and it was the right of Aryan Germans to push them beyond the Ural Mountains to the frozen wastes of Siberia so that the Germans could settle in the vast expanses of Southern Russia. His alleged 1000-year rule of the Reich collapsed within 6 years due to the combined onslaught of the USSR, the USA and other allied countries, who occupied the country, declared Nazi party a criminal organization and effectively banned it. It is noteworthy that racial pride only served as justification for Germany to institute a more violent form of the sense of cultural and civilizational superiority that had been used by other European powers to justify the establishment of overseas imperial rule over about a third of humanity. Once again, expedient short-term policies were ultimately defeated by deeper evolutionary forces.

There were subsequent efforts to build a permanent peace and economic cooperation in Western Europe. This too proved a partial expedient for it failed to address the security concerns of the communist bloc, ushering in a 40-year Cold War and unprecedented threat to human security posed by the nuclear arms race between communist and capitalist nations, epitomized by the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. For 13 days the world remained on the brink of nuclear war, until the Soviets withdrew their missiles from Cuba under pressure after intense negotiations.

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism, the boundaries of democratic capitalism were extended by the founding and expansion of the European Union to encompass 28 nations and the expansion of NATO to include USA and 29 European nations. But cooperative security even between a larger group of nations is proving to be a partial and unstable solution. For it fails to address the legitimate security concerns of nations left outside the system which feel intimidated by its growing dominance. In the absence of a truly cooperative global security system, instead of a lasting, stable, durable peace, tensions have once again begun to rise and new alliances began to replace the old.

The Cold War military and political alliances provided no lasting solution to end the threat of hostilities between European powers. They only served to extend the sphere of competition from Europe to the rest of the world, where proxy battles were fought in Korea, Vietnam, Nicaragua and countless other fields in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

This stalemate ended with the demise of Soviet Communism and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc when both sides finally realized that the nuclear arms race was truly a MAD

endeavor which posed a growing threat to all humanity and could never be a viable path to enduring peace. The suddenness and magnitude of the radical changes that took place in 1989 and the following two years offer profound insight into the wide discrepancy between human intentions and the compelling forces of social evolution. When German Chancellor Kohl and Soviet President Gorbachev conferred privately in June 1989, they agreed that the reunification of Germany was inevitable. They both also agreed that it would probably take place after 30 years or more. In less than 12 months, East and West Germany were united. Within 24 months, the USSR broke up and communist regimes throughout the East Bloc were replaced by elected governments.

Events unraveled much faster than either of these leaders or anyone else conceived possible. Gorbachev's initiative to liberalize Soviet Communism by introducing his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (openness and restructuring) acquired a momentum of their own and led to a widespread clamor for freedom that ultimately dissolved the entire edifice of communist rule. When the first protests broke out, Gorbachev rejected the option of using military force to control the resistance. His decision not to use armed force led first to the breakaway of the Baltic republics followed by other former Soviet republics and allies. When Russian President Boris Yeltsin declared independence from the Soviet Union along with Ukraine and Belarus, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The unravelling of the Soviet Union was reflected in similar demands from East European satellite countries which toppled their Communist rulers one after the other. The peak of this unravelling came when the Berlin Wall fell down in 1989 and the two Germanys became one. When the East German Communist government appealed to the Soviet Union for military intervention, Gorbachev ruled out the possibility saying no Soviet intervention was possible and that they must manage their own problem.

With the total collapse of Communism in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the long-standing Cold War confrontation at the UN came to a peaceful end. This was followed rapidly by efforts to nuclear arms negotiations to control, limit and reduce the nuclear arsenals on both sides, leading to the end of the Cold War and a drastic reduction in the threat of nuclear attack that had been threatening world peace for 45 years. For this magnanimous accomplishment Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

The social mechanisms Society used to dismantle Communism and the associated Cold War tension are many and complicated. As news about western prosperity gradually found its way into the Soviet Union, it created a yearning aspiration among its citizens for such prosperity and comfort. As for Gorbachev he only wanted to humanize Communism and turn it into a people-friendly movement instead of the autocratic and authoritarian entity it had become. But he misjudged the depth of people's thirst for freedom and so when he gave a little it soon swelled to momentous proportions and awakened the clamor for total freedom.

The Russians have long been exposed to authoritarian and autocratic rule. But Communism promised something very different. It even visualized the total disappearance of the State machinery after a brief period of proletarian dictatorship. It is possible that the Russians initially supported the Communist takeover of their country believing that the promised freedom will soon come. But Lenin's death and Stalin's takeover dramatically altered the

possibilities. Stalin suffered from the paranoia of seeing external and internal enemies everywhere. Therefore, to protect himself he instituted an elaborate surveillance system by which just about every family was watched. Under Stalin, internal persecution alone cost the lives of some 30 million Soviet citizens according to some critics. Suffering for long under such regimentation, it is possible that the Soviet people simply grabbed Gorbachev's offer of loosening the controls and rejected the whole oppressive regime. So even during the Cold War internal threats to peace and security were a prominent issue.

The role of terrorism as a spoiler of Peace remains to be answered. It is particularly an acute problem between India and Pakistan, between Israel and Palestine and finally between Islamic countries and the Western World. Terrorism is a recent phenomenon occurring mostly from the 20th century onwards.

The lack of job opportunities for educated Kashmiri youths is another major factor tempting them to join terrorist groups which offer good pay. The Indian government has woken up to this reality and is currently designing schemes for generation of jobs that would prevent Kashmiri youth from joining terrorist camps.

As for the problem between Israelis and Palestinians an enduring peace is proving to be elusive.

Militants from the Gaza Strip are constantly firing rockets into Israeli territory and Israel is fighting back, which is leading to a constant state of warfare. Again it may be a case of unemployment embittering Palestinians residing in refugee camps. There is the Jojoba plant which thrives in arid climates and its oil is highly prized for its lubricant value. If the refugees can be persuaded to cultivate this Jojoba plant on arid soil and find gainful employment, they will be diverted towards work and much of their resentment will disappear. There is the bigger problem of Western Support for Israel which has invited Islamic terrorism to be inflicted on European and American soil. Among the Western Countries the US stands as the single most vocal supporter of Israeli rights, this may have been one of the reasons it suffered the WTC plane attacks in the year 2001. That country has made it plain that it will not stop supporting Israel simply because of terrorist threats.

Terrorists are not simply madmen throwing around bombs and shooting people. Though there may be a lunatic fringe among them, the bulk of terrorist population is nursing genuine grievances against the Western world or for that matter against anybody they choose to target.

For those dwelling in the Gaza Strip, life is simply a hellish experience with so many constraints Israel has imposed on their movements. Western diplomats who have promised to deliver justice and peace to the Palestinians have not been honest and many of them have been deceitful and giving false promises. It is falsehood that invites such brutal terrorism. The Indian governments have routinely rigged elections held in Kashmir so that the party in power can keep its hold on that state. Martial law is in force in that state under cover of which the army is committing many atrocities like midnight raids on families said to be harboring terrorists and violating women in that process. Such false and violent methods no doubt beget the same kind of response from the aggrieved population. The Sri Lankan

government is resisting enquiries into complaints about genocide of innocent Tamils and this very reluctance is strengthening doubts about what happened there. If governments stop such persecution and allow the minorities to live in peace and comfort, much of the resentment harbored by terrorist groups will disappear and there is a good possibility that they will give up violence and come to the negotiating table.

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The Irish Republican Army carried on a violent campaign for annexation of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland for many decades. But a sudden burst of Prosperity between the years 1995 and 2007 brought about by the IT industries made the country so prosperous that people simply forgot the IRA and the terrorist organization itself volunteered to give up arms and violence.

One last enemy of enduring peace is the accumulation of nuclear weapons by nuclear powers. There is said to be a total of nearly 14,000 nuclear weapons in ready-to-use condition the bulk of which are owned by the US and Russia. As of now there are nine nuclear powers and the most provocative of them all is North Korea. Human beings are supposed to be intelligent beings capable of doing what is best to safeguard themselves. But this accumulation of weapons of mass destruction is questioning the very sanity of human beings insofar as they seem to be keen on their own destruction. The US sponsored Non-Proliferation Treaty has succeeded in preventing many nations from becoming nuclear powers. Furthermore, the policy of 'No first use' is also a good guarantee that nuclear war will not break out in the near future. But we cannot rule out the possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorist groups, thus allowing them to threaten the world. It was the US that first used these bombs against Japan in an effort to save American soldiers' lives and to hasten the surrender of Japan. No doubt it achieved that goal. But no nation is more nervous about a nuclear threat than the US right now.

The UN appears to lack the strength to declare the production, possession and use of nuclear weapons as illegal, enforce that prohibition and punish erring nations. Under such a helpless circumstance, the only effective remedy seems to be the formation of a World Government with enough strength to enforce such a prohibition. Post-1950 events in world history are moving in that direction. Formation of the EU is a very good step in that direction. To the extent nations willingly give up their sovereignty to that extent, the collective authority of the world government will grow. The world has become vastly interdependent in economic and other social, military and political matters that nations can no longer afford to take unilateral decisions. A collective decision is very much called for. Climate change is compelling nations to take coordinated decisions. Problems like unemployment, pollution and sharing of waters, fighting new epidemic diseases are all demanding collective decisions. It is only wise and reasonable to take this trend a step further and pave the way for world government. Should a third World War break out, irreparable damage may be caused to the world. It is the responsibility of all globally conscious citizens to rise to the occasion and give birth to a new world order.

Diplomacy is the first step in humanity's evolution from violent conflict to peaceful co-existence. The development of larger, heterogeneous nation-states is an essential further step. Education which enlightens our understanding, tolerance, respect and identity with others and the emergence of a richly diverse, shared universal human culture is another essential step along the way. The final step is global social security and lasting peace founded on a positive conception of peace based on a comprehensive sense of individual security which derives from political freedom, social equality, human dignity, a culture of goodwill and, at the spiritual level, a Self-existent inner life of human security, self-discovery and delight. Humanity's evolution toward a peaceful world is a movement from physical animality to rational human mentality.

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