

To All Who Care about Humanity's and the Planet's Future

Humanity has reached a tipping point. It is time for governments, international institutions and people everywhere to take stock and act with renewed urgency.

The Ukraine conflict is inflicting death, injury, displacement and destruction, exacerbating a global food crisis, driving Europe into recession, and creating shock waves across the world economy.

The Taiwan conflict is threatening to escalate into outright war that would devastate Taiwan and turn East Asia into a powder keg.

More troubling still is the toxic relationship between the United States on the one hand and China and Russia on the other. Here lies the key to both conflicts.

What we are seeing is the culmination of decades of gross mismanagement of global security. The United States has been unwilling to accept, let alone adapt to, the rise of China and the re-emergence of Russia. It remains unwilling to break with outdated notions of global dominance – a legacy of the Cold War and the triumphalism that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A global power shift is taking place. The West-centric world, in which first Europe and then the United States held sway, is giving way to a multi-centric, multi-civilisational world in which other centres of power and influence are demanding to be heard.

Failure to accept this new reality spells immense danger. A new Cold War is now in full swing, which can at any moment mutate into a hot war. In the words of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, "humanity is one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation".

Even if nuclear apocalypse is averted, discord between nuclear armed states inhibits cooperative problem-solving, the provision of global public goods and an effective and independent UN system.

To rise to the challenge we need a coherent, sustained and multifaceted response by governments and international institutions, inspired and driven by an ever watchful and engaged civil society. Several steps suggest themselves, some immediate, others longer term.

The first steps must aim to end the conflict in Ukraine and defuse the tensions over Taiwan. More substantial efforts are needed to foster a framework of cooperative coexistence between the United States, Russia and China – an essential building block for peace across both Europe and Asia.

To this end, we believe the UN Secretary-General or a group of middle powers acting – ideally the two acting in concert – could set in train a multi-pronged initiative aimed at securing an effective and durable ceasefire in Ukraine and the relaxation of tensions over Taiwan.

In the case of Ukraine, the aim must be to secure the cessation of all combat by Russian and Ukrainian forces and separatist groups based in the Donbas region. This would be a ceasefire monitored by a United Nations team reporting regularly and directly to the UN Secretary-General.

A ceasefire, however, is unlikely to hold for long without a durable settlement of the Ukraine-Russian conflict. This will in turn depend on bringing to an end the cynical use of the Ukraine war by great powers intent on pursuing their geopolitical ambitions. Only then will it be possible to achieve:

- the phased withdrawal of Russian military forces;
- an end to the delivery of lethal military aid to Ukraine;
- a constitutionally enshrined policy of neutrality for Ukraine;
- the resolution of jurisdictional issues, notably Crimea and the Donbas region, coupled with a process aimed at healing regional, ethnic and religious animosities within Ukraine.
- All prisoners of war, refugees, and civilians in captivity to be returned to their respective countries and all their rights respected as provided by the Geneva Conventions.

These arrangements will need to be complemented by a wider agreement involving other interested parties, with a view to securing: an adequately funded international program to address the

humanitarian crisis in Ukraine; international guarantees to safeguard Ukraine's independence, neutrality and territorial integrity; and the removal of all sanctions placed against Russia and the restoration of normal trade relations.

In the case of the Taiwan conflict, the first step must be to defuse the current level of tension. To this end, the international community should reaffirm the principles set out in the Shanghai communiqué of 1972, notably the 'one China' principle which now commands widespread international support. In line with this principle, the international community must use all means at its disposal to dissuade Taiwan from making any unilateral declaration of independence. The UN Secretary-General in tandem with ASEAN is well placed to spearhead such a course of action.

These relatively short-term initiatives must pave the way for a series of interlinked consultations, culminating in an international conference, whose primary purpose would be to frame a new global security architecture, sustained by appropriate reforms in global governance and designed to:

1. Stop the march to nuclear oblivion, and set in motion an ambitious program for nuclear disarmament, beginning with a series of arms control and disarmament agreements and leading within a specified timeframe to universal membership of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons;
2. Reflect the reality of a multi-centric, multi-civilisational world which respects the independence and legitimate rights of all sovereign nations, and in which no actor seeks to exercise imperial or hegemonic ambitions.
3. Enshrine the principles of common, cooperative and comprehensive security, and translate these into effective regional arrangements, especially in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region;
4. Initiate a series of measures that can reverse the militarisation of the international system, including limitations on the reach and scope of military alliances and overseas deployments of military forces, as well as a progressive reduction of national military budgets, thereby redirecting resources to areas of pressing social, economic and environmental need;
5. Set in motion the far-reaching reform of international institutions, especially the UN system, so that they can more effectively mount the necessarily cooperative response to existential threats, notably climate change, biodiversity loss, and present and future pandemics.

None of this will happen without a massive global awakening of human wisdom and energy. Important as governments and international institutions are, the initiative for a coherent response to the challenges we face lies largely with the people, with civil society.

Leadership of various kinds is needed. Which is why this message is also addressed to intellectuals, artists, scientists, journalists, religious leaders, advocates and other engaged citizens.

Equally, we have in mind groups working on the rights of indigenous peoples, aid and development, conflict resolution, civil liberties and human rights, violence against women, refugees and asylum seekers, climate change and other threats to our environment, public health (not least Covid), justice for the poor and marginalised, and ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. ALL are adversely affected by great power confrontation, oppressive security laws, rising military budgets and destructive military activities, not to mention the prospect of nuclear catastrophe. ALL have a crucial part to play.

Trade unions, professional networks (in education, law, medicine, nursing, media, communications), farmer organisations, religious bodies, human-centred think tanks and research centres have also much to contribute to the conversation for a habitable future.

It is time for people everywhere to take the initiative personally and collectively – to set in motion conversations, small and large, formal and informal, online and in person, using the written and spoken word, as well as the visual and performing arts. This is a moment for collective reflection on where we're at, where we should be heading and the steps needed to get us there.

The stakes are high. We need bold thinking that connects people and issues within and between countries. We must revive and reframe the global security conversation. There is not a moment to lose.

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