



Missed Opportunities: Ukraine is an UN-finished Story of Global Proportions

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Abstract

This paper seeks to look beyond the sense of justifiable outrage and horror over the events still unfolding as a result of the war in Ukraine to examine the root causes of the current conflict and the essential issues that need to be addressed in order to end and prevent its recurrence. It challenges simplistic assumptions underlying the sense of pessimism, fatality and inevitability that pervade current thinking so much and which is used to justify the revival of deeply flawed ideas and failed policies, discarded as obsolete decades ago. It re-examines the concepts and strategies on which the current model of security is founded, calling for a shift from competitive national security to an inclusive cooperative security system and for a broadening of our approach to encompass the full gamut of interdependent human security threats—political, economic, social, cultural, technological, personal and environmental—the indivisible dimensions of the three cardinal human aspirations for peace, security and sustainable development. It calls also for immediate affirmation of Negative Security Assurances (NSAs) and other measures to drastically reduce the threat of nuclear war with its calamitous impact on humanity and our planet's life support system. Finally, it focuses on the essential, irreplaceable function of global rule of law and multilateral institutions in any viable and sustainable system of global governance resting on the foundation of a slowly emerging, richly varied culture of universal human values. Nothing can justify the horrendous suffering and destruction resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but outrage and the aggressive defense of human freedom are not sufficient to address the root causes which have enabled it to occur. Wise, visionary, courageous leadership is needed to fashion a multilateral system that can end and prevent its recurrence.

Events of the last three months cast doubt on many fundamental assumptions, expectations and projections regarding the direction and future course of human history. The sudden onset of the invasion of Ukraine marks the greatest mobilization for war in three-quarters of a century. And the round-the-clock cycle of TV, internet and press coverage by the global media has brought real-time coverage of the war into the homes of millions of people around the world, leaving many stunned, perplexed, outraged, frightened, and disillusioned, as if all the gains of the last three decades and perhaps much of those made since 1950 are vanishing before our very eyes.

People around the world have borne witness to the brutal onslaught and devastating impact of the Russian attack on Ukraine and its people in the most widely televised, closely

documented war in history. The glamour of armies battling heroically has been replaced by scenes of innocent civilians, schools, hospitals, residential communities helplessly caught in the line of fire. The inspiring heroism and resolve of the Ukrainian people have evoked outcries of sympathy and support from around the world and unprecedented condemnation of the aggression by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice.^{1,2,3} The plight of 14 million refugees has evoked from the countries of the EU and NATO a degree of unity, common economic action and financial support few would have thought possible in these times of political discord and social polarization.

At the same time the war has sent shockwaves around the world in the form of the mounting threats of food shortages and famine, soaring energy prices, inflation, disrupted supply chains, severed commercial relationships, and declining global economic prospects. Fossil fuel has once again been transformed from a natural resource into a weapon to support mass destruction. The war has spurred a sudden shift in national priorities from investments in sustainable development to the boosting of defense budgets and production, wiping out hopes of a peace dividend to fund the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). And the resurgent threats of nuclear warfare have brought back memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis and revived fears of a nuclear-induced global environmental calamity that no climate strategy could control or mitigate.

In the time it takes for winter to transition into spring, decades of diplomacy, arms control negotiations, global economic relations, long term investment plans, regional security agreements, international legal frameworks, multilateral institutional arrangements, the evolving political configuration of the world's nations and the future security of humanity have been cast in doubt.

The sense of sympathy, outrage and righteous indignation over the events that have unfolded have made it extremely difficult to rationally reflect on the root causes of the conflict, the likely consequences of the expanding war between Russia and NATO-backed Ukraine, or the ultimate impact of these events on the future of humanity. But no matter how tempting it is to take sides emotionally, legally, and morally, we fail in our responsibility to humanity when we respond with passion and self-justification where calm reflection, perceptive insight, adept diplomacy, and courageous leadership offer the only possible means that can lead to a better future.

1. Looking Backward with Prophetic Hindsight

Even as people were struggling to get accustomed to the sensational scenes of violence and suffering, the attention of many political leaders, diplomats and academicians has turned to the past in search of explanations and scapegoats for the events that are now unfolding. Warning signs that had been ignored, errors and omissions of diplomacy, failures to act sooner or more forcefully have been identified in the Maidan Revolution of 2014, which was quickly followed by the invasion of Crimea, the Orange Revolution of 2004, the growing dependence of Western Europe on Russian energy, and the failure to heed the repeated efforts of Russia to either stop the eastward expansion of NATO or to be admitted among NATO members.

Some have traced recent events still further back to the circumstances, promises and actions that immediately followed the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, focusing on deeper fundamental political and cultural differences such as democracy vs autocracy or individualism vs collectivism or to Russia's imperial past—factors which were previously discounted but suddenly appear as insurmountable obstacles to future peace.

At the same time attention has been turned forward to imagine the ultimate cessation of fighting, the future of Ukraine and its people, the growing confrontation between Russia and NATO, implications for future relations with China, the retreat from the globalization of markets and the international financial system, and the revival of the Cold War nuclear and conventional arms race. And the resort to unprecedented economic and financial sanctions is likely to spur a reconfiguration of the international financial system. The vulnerability of global supply chains has spurred a shift back to self-sufficiency, prompting some to herald the end of globalization or its reversal. It is perplexing to see how quickly acceptable possibilities seem to have disappeared and trapped humanity on an irreversible course.

It is easy to see the dire warnings of the writing on the wall staring us in the face, and more difficult to look beyond the appearances to the latent opportunities waiting to recast our world. Assuming the worst in bad times imparts a sense of wisdom and certainty which sanctions and energizes the very thing we most fear. Focusing on the cracks and crevices in that vision points us to the hidden opportunities for rapid and radical transformation at a time when prevailing structures and ways of life need to change as radically as life behind the Iron Curtain changed after 1990. Are we willing and prepared?

In retrospect it is evident that the sudden and near miraculous succession of events that led to the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the dissolution of the Soviet empire and of the USSR itself were accompanied by serious blunders, unaddressed problems and missed opportunities that would eventually come back to haunt us as they are doing today. Among these errors and omissions two stand out most prominently: the failure to establish a truly inclusive global cooperative security system that would safeguard the rights of all nations and the failure to completely eradicate nuclear weapons after the doctrine of mutually assured destruction had been discarded as obsolete. Resolution of the problems underlying the current conflict in Ukraine ultimately will depend on the courage, wisdom and vision of world leaders to address these two issues.

2. Looking forward with Uncertainty and Nostalgia

The prevailing feeling today is increasingly anxious uncertainty about the future. Uncertainty is a sign of the confusion that invariably appears at times of radical change. It is also a sign of recognition that the ideas, premises, assumptions on which we have been working up until now may no longer be valid. Consciousness of the limitations of our present knowledge and beliefs constitutes a form of self-awareness and humility that can open up unexpected opportunities which no one has foreseen.

In trying to foresee the future, it is wise to know the limits of our knowledge and the mental instrument, ideas, facts and understanding on which it is based. Who among us had the vision

to foresee the revolutionary events that followed in quick succession after the fall of the Berlin Wall right up to the birth of the global internet? As former WAAS President Harlan Cleveland observed in one of his last recorded speeches,

Although political change has moved swiftly in other times and places, it is hard to think of a historical moment with a comparable rate of acceleration. One observer said that, in 1989, the ouster of a Communist party took roughly 10 years in Poland, ten months in Hungary, ten weeks in East Germany, ten days in Czechoslovakia, and ten hours in Romania. Real history doesn't come in such neat packages, but the remark helps remind us of that cascade of political surprises that filled our television screens in the autumn of 1989 and again in the autumn of 1991, when the Soviet Union itself fell apart and its republics started trying to pick up the pieces.⁴

In July 1989 President Gorbachev and Chancellor Kohl met privately and discussed the future of Europe. They both agreed that German reunification was inevitable. But they also agreed that it might well take 30 or 50 years or even more for it to happen. Within 12 months of their meeting, it became a reality. In hindsight there are innumerable scholars who can explain the events that unfolded following the summer of 1989. But during the period in which they occurred, very few if any on either side of the Iron Curtain accurately foresaw the events that subsequently unfolded in quick succession to usher in a new age of unprecedented peace, commerce and interrelationship among the people and nations of the world.

Nor was this blindness regarding what was about to happen a historical aberration. At the end of the Second World War, the Allied imperial powers were anxious to maintain their empires around the world, in spite of having fought a war to stop imperial empire-building by their Axis opponents. Yet within a few decades one third of humanity was liberated from imperial oppression and the original 51 founding members of the UN multiplied into 120, then 150 and eventually the 193 we have today.

Our response to uncertainty depends on our attitudes and expectations. For tens of millions of former Soviet citizens and allies, the future in 1989-90 was filled with goodwill for their erstwhile Western enemies and naïve euphoria regarding a better future under democracy and capitalism. When the dissolution of the USSR was announced at the end of 1991, I asked the head of a Russian economic institute in Moscow what he expected would be the impact of the breakup on the tightly integrated Soviet economy. With typical Russian pessimism, he predicted a 50% fall in per capita GDP. When I protested that such a catastrophe far exceeded the impact of the Great Depression, he shrugged his shoulders—a lone dissenting voice among the prophets of rapid prosperity. I was stunned with disbelief. It turned out we were both wrong. The actual average decline in the former Soviet republics was 54%. And it took many years for the majority of citizens of the former Soviet Bloc to regain the security they had lost at the time and to surpass their previous standards of living under communism. Looking forward prophetically is a hazardous profession regardless, whether one is an optimist or a pessimist. Foresight is never as reliable as hindsight, regardless of the conviction and enthusiasm with which it is predicted.

So too, the rising uncertainty of the prosperous West today appears differently when viewed from different perspectives. Many of those more concerned with the destruction of the earth's environment and the catastrophic threat of climate change may look with relief at a slowdown or reversal of economic growth. And the 140 plus nations which lie outside the Western collective security system may not feel reassured by the growing strength or cohesion of NATO, since they are not protected by its security umbrella.

3. From Competitive to Cooperative Security

Indeed, it is just such a lack of appreciation for perspectives other than our own that led the USA and NATO to underestimate and ignore the serious security threat perceived by Russia when the West began to back out of the commitments it had given to keep NATO out of the Russian security sphere in the 1990s. In October 1994 a report by the International Commission on Peace and Food (ICPF) entitled *Uncommon Opportunities: Agenda for Peace and Equitable Development*, was released by Harlan Cleveland at the WAAS Minneapolis General Assembly and then by Gus Speth, Administrator of UNDP in New York and Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO in Paris, before being formally submitted to the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali with a personal endorsement by Gorbachev. Among its recommendations, the report stressed the need for a radical shift in security doctrine from a competitive national system to a global cooperative security paradigm.⁵

In a chapter authored by international security expert and WAAS Fellow Jasjit Singh, the ICPF report argued:

The competitive security paradigm is a state-centred, egocentric approach in which the security of each nation is perceived in terms of its military superiority over potential adversaries. The push of each nation for unlimited security through military power is inherently destabilizing, since it inevitably increases the level of insecurity of other sovereign states. In practice, the effort of nations to arm themselves against perceived external threats generates a sense of insecurity among other nations and compels them in turn to increase military preparedness, thus initiating a vicious spiral, as it did during the Cold War. When NATO and the Warsaw Pact had armed themselves to the point where direct confrontation became too risky, mutual suspicion and insecurity led them to fight each other through proxy wars in the developing world. Every move by either side was perceived as a potential security threat, prompting a counter by the other. Compounded by the inherent instability of nuclear weapons, this doctrine led to the anomaly of increasing military power and steadily decreasing national and international security.⁶

The report called for action to prevent perpetuation of this flawed competitive security paradigm.

This is an occasion that demands visionary and courageous leadership to usher in a better world. The children of the next millennium will judge us by our response... Historically, all landmark changes in the international political and security system

have been the result of armed conflicts, wars and revolutions. In each case the victors who emerged from the ashes of war sought to build on a static formula for enforcing peace in a dynamic world. In each case, the arrangements for conflict termination contained a dynamism that would produce the tensions, disputes and conflicts of the future. These in-built limitations and imbalances resist adjustment until a new round of fighting sweeps away the old frame work and replaces it with another, fashioned in much the same way.⁷

It is no wonder that as NATO expanded in recent decades, the calls by Russian leaders, including Putin, for Russian admission to NATO became increasingly fervent. Meanwhile Russian objections to NATO expansion to include former Russian allies became increasingly strident. At a meeting of NATO Ambassadors at Split in May 2013, a WAAS delegation questioned NATO officials regarding the future role they perceived for Russia in the alliance. Our question was met with a deafening silence. The following year Putin invaded Crimea.

NATO's refusal to admit Russia or bar the future admission of Ukraine is not sufficient justification for Russia's aggression, but it is evidence of a widespread failure of leaders to understand the depth and intensity of the concerns which eventually led to war. And it is an indication that efforts to finally address the outstanding security concerns of all parties must complete work left undone three decades ago.

We find ourselves once again in the position anticipated by the ICPF report a quarter century ago:

We are now at an historic crossroads: one path leads us back to a static, unstable and exclusive competitive security paradigm; the other leads to a far more stable and dynamic cooperative security paradigm inclusive of all nations and responsive to future needs and challenges. A global cooperative security system is needed that seeks to strengthen national security without increasing the insecurity of other states. It should be based on the fundamental principle that force will no longer be tolerated by the international community as a legitimate instrument of national policy.⁸

4. Nuclear Weapons

The second intractable security threat which the world failed to address at the end of the Cold War was that posed by nuclear weapons. In spite of a dramatic reduction in nuclear warheads by Russia and USA from over 64,000 in the late 1980s to less than 13,000 today, the number of nuclear weapons states has nearly doubled from five to nine and the continued threat of nuclear weapons has suddenly become more real and imminent than at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The catastrophic consequences of all-out nuclear war are too horrible to imagine. Moreover, the potential environmental impact of detonating even one percent of the current nuclear arsenals would so severely impact the earth's climate, agricultural production and global food supply as to exceed the worst case IPCC scenarios of the havoc that will accompany global warming.

But even if no weapons are ever used, the continued presence and perceived “legitimacy” of threatening the use of nuclear weapons has already undermined fundamental tenants of international relations and global rule of law. If a nuclear superpower like Russia can use the threat of nuclear retaliation as an offensive weapon to prevent the international community from defending the sovereign rights of Ukraine from foreign invasion, then what will the world do if a North Korea, an even smaller country or a terrorist group obtains and threatens to use nuclear weapons to forestall interference with their blatant acts of blackmail and aggression against their neighbors?

The most insidious threat of these and other weapons of mass destruction is that they threaten the sanctity of the very principles upon which international relations are founded. Even if we do not have the power to compel the physical destruction of all nuclear weapons, humanity does have the power to immediately adopt more limited measures to drastically reduce the threat of nuclear war. The most practical immediate first step would be the universal adoption of Negative Security Assurances (NSAs) by all nuclear weapon states.

A NSA is a guarantee by a nuclear state that it will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear state. In the past the five Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nuclear weapon states have made several pledges regarding negative security assurances. In April 1995 the five original nuclear-weapon states did provide pledges on NSAs to the non-nuclear-weapon States which are parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as reflected in Security Council resolution 984 (1995).⁹ In spite of persistent efforts under the NPT and the Disarmament Committee, NSAs have not yet been made universally legally-binding.¹⁰ Global Security Institute (GSI) and others have highlighted the extreme risk of nuclear conflict generated by the Ukraine conflict and called for a General Assembly resolution reaffirming the essential importance of NSAs to set limits on the potential consequences of the fighting in Ukraine.

The second most urgent step would be universal adoption by all nuclear weapon states of a no-first-use policy as advocated by WAAS partners such as GSI, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, European Leadership Network and many other organizations.

The Ukraine crisis is a call to address a far greater threat to humanity than prolonged fighting in Eastern Europe. Until the threat of nuclear war is completely abolished, all our efforts to build a permanent peaceful security and governance system for the world community can never be achieved.

5. Facts & Myths about Cultural Universality vs. Irreconcilable Conflict

A case is once again being made that the conflict between Russia and NATO and the rising tensions between China and the West in recent years are signs of an inevitable conflict between cultures founded on democratic values and those founded on autocracy. The revival of this thesis appeals for its simplicity and historical precedent, but it may not survive a deeper consideration. The intolerance of autocracy in the West and the mistrust of democracy in China and Russia is an overly simplistic stereotype.

Historically, the gradual evolution from various forms of autocracy to democracy has been occurring for centuries in nations around the world. No culture can claim a monopoly on monarchical, feudal and imperial forms of government. None can claim it has been exempt from autocratic tendencies in the past. Even today we are shocked by its rise in bastions of democracy such as France and the USA. At the same time, economic democratization has made great strides in China up until China's continued progress came to be perceived as a threat to Western economic dominance. And Russia made considerable progress toward a more liberal political system until its efforts to be admitted on equal footing to Western society had been continuously shunned with suspicion. As a result, both countries now perceive the West as a threat.

“To aggrandize their own power, the Putins and Trumps of the world create walls that divide us by fear, suspicion, anger and self-righteousness, but those walls can be torn down. Let us not now legitimize those divisive, self-serving tactics by reconstructing an impenetrable mental or cultural wall.”

In times of perceived external threat, centralized authority at the national level gains prevalence, as illustrated by the unilateral actions of the US government against Japanese immigrants during World War II and on the falsified grounds for the 2003 US invasion of Iraq based on fabricated evidence of a nuclear threat. It also happens at times when internal social forces undermine people's confidence in the future prospects offered by their own system, as during the appeal of Communism in the US during the Great Depression. Even in times of relative prosperity, such as Americans now enjoy, the rapid and radical changes in technology, economy, immigration, social values, inter-religious and inter-cultural relations can generate a perceived threat to national identity which revives ultra-conservative and reactionary undemocratic tendencies.

It is true that some 40 nations chose to abstain from taking sides in the General Assembly vote on Russia's invasion of Ukraine for a variety of reasons. Some, no doubt, were under pressure or obligation to Russia. But some also perceived that the wholesale assignment of blame on Russia was a gross oversimplification of the issues. It failed to take into account similar violations of national sovereignty by other countries and Russia's legitimate security concerns.

It is right to recognize and take into account the real differences in present political, social and cultural values, but it is an error to conclude that current distinctions are absolute and unchangeable differences. The notion of a permanent cultural divide between the people of the world fails to take into account just how far the more economically advanced nations of the world have evolved in recent times. The American Declaration of Independence proclaimed that all men are created equal, but the men referred to were white, Christian, English-speaking property-owners who constituted less than five percent of the population. English democracy

at the time admitted a comparable portion of its population. Neither recognized the equal rights of women, blacks, slaves, religious minorities, or the indigent. Women only obtained the right to vote in both countries during the 1920s. Slavery and slave trade were prominent among the most “civilized” nations of the world during the 18th century. America had to fight a bloody civil war to eradicate the legal right to slavery. For the past 150 years it has been fighting legal battles for the equality of women and blacks which are still going on in court rooms around the country. On many of these issues, almost all nations are more socially liberal and advanced than the West was in 1950s. Even at the time Western democracies were extolling the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one-third of humanity were forcibly oppressed citizens of imperial colonies around the world. None of the world’s leading democracies were willing to accord the UDHR force of law in 1948.

The illusion of irreconcilable differences with Russia was broken for me on my very first visit to Moscow in August 1989 when all the stereotypes of the cultural divide dissolved before the humanity of breathing hearts and minds. The Russian soul is that of an anarchist kept temporarily under wraps by external authority, as its religious impulses were during 70 years of communism, only to explode back with renewed passion since 1990. Let us acknowledge the real differences imposed by prevailing politics—like the waves of MAGA ultra-conservatism sweeping America today—without making the error of dividing humanity into airtight incompatible cultures. Every nation has its Taliban and other varieties of extremism. The peaceful assimilation of the world’s immigrants into liberal American culture is evidence that the contradictions are largely temporal, special and circumstantial, rather than fundamental, and they evolve over time. In times of stress, the social pendulum can rapidly shift from one extreme to another, as it did in the USA after Obama completed two terms as the first African-American President. No society has a monopoly on autocracy and fundamentalism. To aggrandize their own power, the Putins and Trumps of the world create walls that divide us by fear, suspicion, anger and self-righteousness, but those walls can be torn down. Let us not now legitimize those divisive, self-serving tactics by reconstructing an impenetrable mental or cultural wall, which has taken so many decades to tear down.

A further complication has arisen in the case of the war in Ukraine as observed by Jonathan Granoff. It is the inability of nations at different stages of social-political evolution to fully understand the conduct of one another. In order to generate trust and provide a reliable basis for relationships, diplomacy requires a sense of stability, continuity and reliability in the positions taken by parties on both sides. Autocratic governments expect a level of continuity which the frequent changes in leadership common in democracies are often unable to provide. Thus, the verbal assurances of American governments to Russia at the end of the Cold War were mistaken for long term guarantees for Russian security to such an extent that even written agreements were not initially deemed essential. Whereas successive democratically-elected leaders in the West have not felt bound to the oral assurances and commitments made by their predecessors from different political persuasions. The remarkable aura of trust that prevailed between East and West at the end of the Cold War turned gradually to disappointment, a sense of betrayal and anger, as it underwent different interpretations and mutations by successive governments. In the absence of effective, empowered multilateral

institutions to arbitrate and enforce agreements, cultural differences, even when transient, can result in serious misunderstandings and conflicts. So the issues are very real, even if they are not necessarily permanently irreconcilable.

Nothing that has happened can ever morally justify the suffering caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, any more than it could justify the inhuman conduct of the Nazis during World War II which Russia disingenuously claims is the type of conduct it is now fighting to combat in Ukraine. But after 1945 Western Europe learned from its past errors rather than repeating them again. Erstwhile enemies embraced one another and embarked on the greatest and most successful experiment so far undertaken to transcend the pernicious side of nationalism and imperialism in favor of regional cooperation and integration on an unprecedented scale. We too would be wise to learn from the past and seek to devise solutions based on this remarkable achievement, rather than retreat to failed practices of the past.

Ukraine has survived the Russian invasion precisely because it reminded people and nations around the world about the value of their most precious resource—freedom. No one imagined that the nations of Europe would join together to defend Ukraine in the face of Russia's threat to cut off vital energy supplies. The aspiration for freedom that spurred the American, French, Russian, Indian and countless other freedom struggles in the past is still alive in the hearts of all human beings and waiting for its time to burst forth. The world is divided by serious political, social, economic and cultural barriers, but at a deeper level we share common aspirations for freedom and human security that can be suppressed for some time but never eradicated. No country or culture can claim a cultural monopoly on it.

The notion that universal values represent an effort to impose the cultural biases of one portion of humanity on all the rest is both a gross oversimplification and distortion of reality. For what we are witnessing today is not the wholesale superimposition of one set of values on all humanity but rather an increasingly rich and complex mixture, synthesis and integration of different cultural perspectives to forge a composite global culture of unrivaled tolerance for differences and recognition of a level of social equality never before achieved by human civilization. The evolution of global culture is an achievement of humanity, not a victory for any particular culture. And as it continues, we may anticipate increasing variety rather than uniformity, as the universal spiritual values of the East have already so deeply penetrated the thinking and religious traditions of the West.

The adoption of universal human values has been and will continue to be an evolutionary process much more than a cultural one. It is fostered in conditions which provide physical security for individuals and communities from external threats, economic security and remunerative employment, and rising levels of education, and other forms of human security universally sought after and cherished. When any of these are under threat, the retreat to authority gains appeal. Recognition of this truth explains why 193 nations of the world unanimously endorsed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals which are an effort to transform the idealistic universal values affirmed in the UDHR into practical, ground realities in the lives of their citizens.

At the same time, it is true that several sub-motifs of this evolutionary progression do complicate the issue and generate genuine sources of conflict along the way. The first is the increasing heterogeneity within societies that results in tensions between the more educated, urban and cosmopolitan communities and the more insular, homogeneous parts of society less exposed to other cultural influences, as shown in the urban-rural divide in America, which grows more prominent and provocative as the speed of globalization increases.

This reaction has been further aggravated by the rapid intrusion of the internet into previously insular communities and the conscious exploitation of these differences by political parties, financial interests and, in the case of both Russia and the West, by the intentionally polarizing impact of fake news and propaganda, which demonstrate how sensitive and vulnerable even the most highly educated societies can be to efforts to weaponized social and cultural conflicts.

6. Solution to Global Challenges demands a Global Perspective

The problem with much of the discussion about the future today is that it is conducted from the perspective and with regard to the interests of particulate stakeholder groups at a time when what is needed is thinking of solutions that will address the uncertainty, anxiety, aspiration and concerns of all humanity. That is the kind of leadership in thought the world needs in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of 1945 and 1991.

In 2019-20 WAAS collaborated with the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) on a project entitled “Global Leadership in the 21st Century”. The objective was to address the vacuum in leadership at the global level. This leadership deficit in thought and action had been widening for decades due to the increasing speed and complexity of global social interrelationships and the lack of support for multilateral institutions by UN member states, combined with their persistent refusal to increase access to the UN for other important stakeholder groups, particularly NGOs, representatives of future generations, academia, business and finance. The joint WAAS-UNOG report in September 2020 included 24 catalytic strategies to enhance the effectiveness of global leadership under five broad headings—Redefining Multilateralism, Sustaining Peace & Human Security, Mobilizing Civil Society, Financing Implementation of SDGs, and Transforming Education.¹¹

The inability of the UN system to play a lead role in the Ukraine crisis is reminiscent of the way it was bypassed by the major powers in dealing with previous crises, such as the war in Afghanistan from 2001, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Syrian Civil war from 2011 and countless other examples. The uncertainty the world faces today is largely the result of the refusal of nation states to vest sufficient power in the institutions of international law and governance, which is so essential to effectively address global threats such as pandemics, global security and climate change.

The UN was established and funded by member states and it can only be as strong and effective as its members enable it to be. Retreat to the Cold War model of a world divided into power blocs is bound to fail. The current crisis presents an opportunity to compensate for our collective failures in 1945 and 1991 and build the kind of institutions and leadership needed to address uncertainty and insecurity in the 21st century.

7. Human Security

Our present uncertainty and insecurity are undermined not only by institutional weaknesses. They are also severely impaired by prevailing concepts and dogmas. The three most pressing challenges confronting humanity in recent years—the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences and repercussions of the invasion of Ukraine, and the existential climate crisis—all share several things in common. None of them can be effectively addressed by individual nation states acting unilaterally, by the piecemeal policies of specialized institutions acting separately and independently of one another. Addressing these challenges necessitates a coordinated collective action by the world community as a whole acting in and through the multilateral system.

The very notion that security can be won by \$2 trillion in annual military spending is deeply flawed and was supposed to have been discredited thirty years ago when military spending declined by one-third within three years and arms control agreements led to an 80% reduction in the nuclear weapons stockpile. The recent rise to record levels of military spending, which is now expected to climb dramatically due to the war in Ukraine, reflects the fact that we have already forgotten the lessons learned during 40 years of Cold War and we have failed to strengthen the institutions needed to prevent a repeat of the errors made after World War II.

The problem of security today is not limited to war between nations. No war since 1945 has impacted the security of global society as severely as the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of loss of life, economic costs, economic paralysis, blockage to transportation, shutting down of factories and businesses, closure of schools and colleges, loss of jobs and incomes. And these temporary losses pale into insignificance when compared with the anticipated and rapidly approaching consequences of climate change, which will impact all nations, all regions and all levels of global society for the long term.

Today the solution to the war in Ukraine is primarily viewed in military terms by both sides. But a military solution of any description will leave unaddressed the underlying root causes that led to the conflict in the first place. The more resources are poured into an arms race on both sides, the greater the insecurity, instability and prospect of greater violence in the future. Is that the kind of solution and the kind of world we should be heading for?

The real security threats today are threats which impact all dimensions of the life of global society—political, economic, health, education, community, personal and environmental. They include all the issues identified and being addressed by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. And they are all interlinked, interconnected and interdependent with one another, so they will defy efforts to address them in the piecemeal, fragmented manner which now predominates. And we must add to the traditional list of security threats new ones which were not envisioned in UNDP's original report on human security in 1994 or in the 17 SDGs and 169 targets included in Agenda 2030. Take, for example, the Internet which renders both democracies and autocracies socially vulnerable, regardless of whether they are economically all-powerful and or ruthlessly authoritarian over their own populations. For

today we also confront severe threats to personal, social, national and global security from other directions—financial crisis, fake news, cyber wars, artificial intelligence, increasing social fragmentation and polarization, and decline of faith in the major institutions on which all our present achievements are founded.

The only viable solution to human security is to approach the full gamut of threats in a comprehensive, integrated manner that views all these dimensions as aspects of a single issue and objective—to promote Human Security for all people and nations everywhere on earth. We must abandon the narrow partisan viewpoints of competing nation states and join together to promote the concept of human security for people everywhere.

8. Observations and Conclusions

This paper concludes with a few central observations and suggestions.

1. **International Law is the Foundation for Peace and Human Security:** War has always involved terrible offenses against human rights, dignity, justice and universal values. But never before has the whole world witnessed those offenses close up, first hand, and felt so outraged by their continued existence. Moral indignation is not sufficient to eradicate them. That can only be done by establishing an institutional framework for law in which no nation is exempted and no nation can exercise an inordinate power to veto condemnation by the global community. **Refusal of nation states to cede authority to a global system has left us all vulnerable.** Russia's disregard of global authority has its earlier counterpart in the example of other nations in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.
2. **Emerging Global Social Consciousness:** Law is the codification of public conscience. Enforceable law is not determined by what is written in the statutes but what the general public accepts, endorses and demands be enforced. The consensus of the politically and socially polarized fractured American public on the appropriate response to Ukraine was certainly not what Putin expected. Nor the equally remarkable unity of the energy-dependent nations of the European Union to assert their independence at a moment of maximum vulnerability. Nor the radical swing in public opinion within traditionally neutral Sweden, Finland and Switzerland renouncing neutrality in the face of Russian aggression. Nor the 141 members of the UN General Assembly that approved the UN resolution condemning the aggression and calling for immediate cease-fire. Not even the 40 nations that abstained for different reasons: for apart from political considerations of self-interest, the fact remains that there is more than one side of the story which needs to be heard and considered by the global community. Nor the International Court of Justice's preliminary decision ordering Russia to suspend military operations in Ukraine and affirming the Court's compulsory legal jurisdiction under the UN Charter over matters regarding genocide.¹² Three-quarters of a century after the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the contents of the UDHR have still not acquired the full force of international law—but recent events can bring us at least one step closer to that goal.

3. **Nuclear lawlessness undermines the authority of international law:** The very existence of nuclear weapons and the perceived right of nations to use them, even in self-defense, undermines the very basis for international law. For it means that any nation, no matter how small or ill-justified, can hold its neighbors, region or perhaps the whole world for ransom the way Russia has recently threatened to respond to any nations that interfere with its aggression against Ukraine. Without enforceable international law, there can be no viable human community and international law can never be sacrosanct and inviolable until nuclear weapons are fully outlawed and abolished.
4. **From Competitive to Cooperative Security:** The mutual interdependence of states has rendered the costs of global warfare suicidal. Exclusive collective security systems are provocative and unstable. It is not too late to compensate for the missed opportunities of 1991 by reversing acceleration of the arms race and transforming NATO into an inclusive cooperative security system that admits all those who commit to its fundamental principles. Regardless of the outrage over Russia's invasion or the mutual distrust on both sides, it is nothing to compare with the crimes against humanity committed during World War Two or the level of animosity between the Allies on one side and Germany and Japan on the other. If the world could overcome the hostility of those times to forge strong alliances that have stood the test of seven decades, then it is certainly possible to do so now.
5. **From Militarism to Human Security:** The choice is not between national security backed by military preparedness and human security focused on sustainable and equitable development for all. National security and human security are complementary dimensions of a comprehensive perspective of what is required to promote safety, stability, protection, rights and dignity for all human beings. But the one-sided reliance on military preparedness and lopsided investment in armaments is counterproductive and dangerous. For without addressing security in this wider sense, peace and cooperation between people, communities and nations are unattainable and unsustainable.

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Notes

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9. “The Conference On Disarmament And Negative Security Assurances” *United Nations* <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CD-and-NSA-Fact-Sheet-Jul2017.pdf>
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