

An Active Peace Policy to Create a New Future

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Few people have the opportunity to make daily decisions at the international level concerning war and peace. But most of us are intimately familiar with another environment prone to conflict: road traffic. Comparing today's prevailing national security policies with the measures we have taken to reduce collisions on the road can help us devise more sensible strategies to maintain international security in the future than the outdated military concepts that are still applied today.

Until about 1880, there were essentially no traffic laws. Carriages passed each other on the left or right, as pedestrians still do today on a sidewalk, and whoever was more aggressive crossed an intersection first. But with the invention of motor vehicles, collisions became more frequent and more dangerous, sometimes fatal, and something had to be done.

The solution adopted was to create traffic laws:

1 We observe certain rules, such as driving on the right (or left hand side in some countries) and stopping at red lights, and wearing safety belts.

2 We drive more carefully than the law requires, to avoid accidents even if others make mistakes. If we arrive at an intersection on a bicycle and have the right of way, but see a heavy truck approaching without stopping, it is not a good idea to insist on our right. There is a famous tombstone inscription: "May he rest in peace. He had the right of way."

3 We take driving lessons and must pass a test before obtaining a driver's license.

4 We build safe roads, wide enough for two vehicles to pass without a collision, with fences along cliffs, etc.

All of these measures improve the common safety

of everyone, not only our own safety at the expense of others. Though accidents do happen occasionally, because these rules are not always followed and not perfectly enforced, it is clear that without such rules we would be much worse off.

Nuclear weapons have now made international anarchy far more dangerous and obsolete than motor vehicles made anarchy on the road obsolete. It is no longer adequate to wait until war breaks out and then to react with military force. This would be comparable to driving a car with closed eyes, waiting until we hit an obstacle, and then reacting by calling an ambulance. We need to pursue a more future-oriented approach, an active peace policy that seeks to foresee possible conflicts and avoid or resolve them long before they lead to war. What would a security policy based on principles analogous to traffic rules look like?

1 We would consistently adhere to international law, and cooperate with other nations to expand and strengthen it. The Reagan administration's refusal to accept the decision of the World Court after it mined Nicaragua's harbors in violation of international law hurt the United States' own long term interest, by making it more difficult for it to take future international disputes before the World Court.

Even if others violate the law, it is not in our interest to do the same. Even if we see someone else to cross a red light, it does not help us to imitate that folly.

Some argue that adhering to international law would restrict a country's sovereignty and freedom. But only by adhering to certain mutually beneficial norms can we gain better control over our destiny. The Kyoto treaty restricts countries' freedom to burn fossil fuels and pollute the atmosphere with carbon dioxide, but saves us

all from potentially catastrophic climate change that may disrupt agriculture, lead to famines, raise the ocean levels, and flood coastal areas, including many of the world's largest cities. No country can control its climate by itself, only through international cooperation and the acceptance of rules that are binding for all can we prevent such future disasters. Similarly, traffic laws restrict our freedom to drive zigzag, if we prefer to do so, but they give us the more important freedom to reach our destination safely and on time.

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is enforced by the International Atomic Energy Agency, but its authority is now too limited. It can only inspect nuclear sites of member countries which they have officially declared. Imagine if a suspected drug or weapons smuggler could tell a border guard, "You may check the passenger compartment, but don't open my trunk," such an "inspection" would be meaningless. We need unannounced random inspections of any suspected nuclear site. Most governments today strongly oppose such inspections as a violation of their national sovereignty. That was also the reaction of many air passengers when airlines began to inspect people's luggage after a series of fatal hijackings. Many said, "You have no right to search my bag, you are violating my privacy," or "Why do you suspect me to be a terrorist?" But today most have come to realize that they can only be safe if everyone's luggage is inspected, including their own. Sooner or later, national governments will reach the same conclusion with regard to the inspection of nuclear sites. The question is whether this will happen before or only after the first incident of nuclear terrorism.

2 It is in each country's interest to avoid provocative behavior, even if it is not explicitly prohibited by international law. Some Americans find it difficult to understand why the Iranians were not more grateful to the United States for having tried to modernize Iran. After the CIA toppled Iran's democratically elected government of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 and installed the Shah, the United States sent over 100,000 advisors and technicians to help convert Iran into a modern country like the

United States. But let us imagine that Ayatollah Khomeini had sent Iranian agents to topple the US government, installed a fundamentalist Islamic leader in the United States, and then sent 100,000 mullahs to help convert the United States into a god-fearing Islamic Republic like Iran. Would most Americans have appreciated such "help"? Hardly. Khomeini may have been a disaster for Iran, but it is necessary to understand the feelings of resentment against foreign influence that brought him to power.

3 Before being allowed to drive a car, anyone must take driving lessons and pass a test, otherwise they could cause an accident and possibly kill someone. But it is ironic that before the US President takes office and control over the US nuclear arsenal, which could kill millions, he or she is only required to pledge to defend the US constitution. We would never issue a driver's license to anyone based merely on a pledge to drive safely! We want to be sure they can actually drive.

One could argue that being elected is a kind of test, but it is more a test of popularity than of actual competence. Imagine a group of air travelers choosing the most popular among them to be their pilot. This could be a prescription for disaster. That does not mean that we abolish elections. But we would limit our choice to those who have undergone the necessary preparation to learn how to defuse a tense crisis without sliding into war. Like controlling an airplane, peaceful conflict transformation (see e.g. Galtung 2000) is a skill that can be taught and learnt. Similarly, if we need to undergo surgery, we do not wish someone to be assigned to be our surgeon simply because he or she did well on a medical exam. We wish to interview several prospective surgeons, and ask others about their experience with them. But we limit that choice to those who have actually gone to medical school. Good intentions alone are not sufficient. We would not even allow our own mother to perform open heart surgery on us, even though their is no doubt that she has the best intentions.

4 Finally, an active peace policy calls for international cooperation in conflict transformation to prevent war, peacekeeping to end violence in case prevention should fail, and reconcil-

iation to prevent a recurrence of violence. It also seeks to improve human security by avoiding ecological catastrophes, combatting hunger and disease, and making education available to all.

In contrast to military preparations which seek to improve one country's security at the expense of threatening the security of others, all of these four components of an active peace policy improve the common security of everyone.

Let us now compare such a comprehensive security policy with the national security policies currently applied or considered:

"Flexible response," which is still NATO's official doctrine, threatens the first use of nuclear weapons against a conventional attack. This is as if we sought to avoid collisions by loading our car with dynamite, wired to explode on impact, to kill anyone hitting us (and ourselves too). This should certainly deter anyone from hitting us intentionally, but the slightest accidental collision would mean our end.

It may be argued that going to war is a deliberate decision, not the result of an accident. But it is not always obvious who is responsible for a war. One can always find something the other side did first. In the 1967 Mideast War, Israel argues that when Egypt blocked Israeli ships in the Bay of Aqaba, this was the first act of war. Egypt on the other hand considered Israel's subsequent air attack on Egyptian air fields as the first act of war.

It is easy to imagine a scenario how "flexible response" could have led to a nuclear war. During the Cold War, NATO conducted daily helicopter patrols along the border between East and West Germany to detect any troop or tank concentrations as an early warning of a possible attack. Suppose one of those helicopters accidentally strayed into East Germany in dense fog and was shot down, with the pilot still alive. The East German government, supported by the Soviet Union, had announced a public trial with a possible death penalty for the pilot as a spy. NATO had sent a rescue mission to extract the pilot alive. The Warsaw treaty members had considered this incursion as an act of aggression and responded with force, overwhelming the outnumbered NATO troops. Both sides would have rushed in reinforcements, and if NATO had

lost the conventional battle, it had escalated by using a nuclear weapon. The Soviet Union had previously announced that it would never use nuclear weapons first, but if attacked with nuclear weapons, it would retaliate with all its nuclear weapons. Such a sequence of events could have led to a nuclear holocaust that nobody planned or wanted.

Proponents of the "nuclear war fighting" doctrine advocate destroying the nuclear forces of an opponent before he can use them, if war appears imminent. That would be like mounting a machine gun on our car, threatening to kill anyone who drove dangerously close to us. That would of course tempt others to get an even bigger gun and, if in doubt, kill us before we could kill them.

The "Bush doctrine," applied in Iraq in the spring of 2003, goes even further by initiating a preventive war before a danger is obvious and imminent. That is comparable to blowing up other people's cars if we think that somewhere, sometime in the future they might hit us. But that only encourages others to do the same to us.

Star wars is not the answer either. Relying on defense against nuclear weapons would be like driving over a cliff wearing a safety belt. Even worse, it would entrust the fate of the earth into an extremely complex technical system, which could go wrong catastrophically. The tragedies of Bhopal and Chernobyl and the recent loss of a second space shuttle have warned us.

As Robert S. McNamara (1995, p. 342) wrote, "The point I wish to emphasize is this: human beings are fallible. We all make mistakes. In our daily lives they are costly, but we try to learn from them. In conventional war, they cost lives, sometimes thousands of lives. But if mistakes were to affect decisions relating to the use of nuclear forces, they would result in the destruction of whole societies. Thus, the indefinite combination of human fallibility and nuclear weapons carries a high risk of a potential catastrophe. Is there a military justification to accept that risk? The answer is no."

To guarantee human survival, we must abolish nuclear weapons before they abolish us.

Indeed, in the 21st century it has become necessary to abolish war itself as an accepted means of settling international disputes, in the same way as we have abolished slavery in the 19th century and colonialism in the 20th century. War is a cruel, obsolete way of handling disputes that causes much suffering, and any conventional war in the nuclear age always carries with it the risk of escalating to nuclear war.

Carnesale et al. (1983) have argued that we might be better off if nuclear weapons had never been invented, but now that we know how to make them, we cannot disinvent them anymore, and therefore have to learn to live with nuclear weapons as long as civilization exists. It is true that we cannot disinvent nuclear weapons, but nobody has disinvented cannibalism either. We simply have learnt to abhor it. Can't we learn to abhor equally the thought of incinerating our planet with nuclear weapons?

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