

# **War or Peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

**By Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.**

**Address to: “Rich Man, Poor Man Dinner”**

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In four decades in public life as a parliamentarian, ambassador and civil society activist, I have been preoccupied with this question: Will we have war or peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? It is a question we ought to probe, since the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw two world wars, plus the Korea and Vietnam wars and several other major conflicts that, all told, took 100 million lives.

What is the outlook for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

One view of the world today sees chaos everywhere. Not since the end of the World War II have there been so many refugees, displaced people, and asylum seekers. Extremism and nationalism are on the rise. Terrorists, such as the Islamic State and Boko Haram, have seized large territories, committed gross human rights violations, and triggered humanitarian crises. Atrocities, the deliberate starvation of civilians, and assaults on hospitals and shelters have become common. The suffering of women and children in failed states is unendurable. Diplomacy among

different regions and cultures is on the defensive, undermined by spates of violence in the Middle East and Africa.

Another view is that, despite the problems highlighting the news every day, the world as a whole is moving to a higher stage of civilization. All the big indicators of modern life – health, education, commerce, science, energy, shipping, communications, transportation, law, women’s rights – are expanding. Two billion people in Africa, Asia and Latin America have been lifted out of dire poverty in the past two decades. A new global middle class is emerging. More people can claim their human rights than ever before. The major powers are not fighting one another as they did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Which is the real world? Both these views reflect reality. So how are we to make sense of such divergence and how can we build hope for an enduring peace? What is going to define our time: *extremism or world progress*? I reject the politics of fear that some politicians are foisting on us. I believe the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be a time of peace -- if we utilize the tools we already have available.

We really ought to examine these questions now because the world is at another turning point. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 ending the Cold War and the terrorist attacks on 9/11 were defining moments for the modern world. But opportunities to lock in a system of peace were lost. Another great moment is upon us: US-Russian relations, centering on Ukraine, are in the most severe crisis mode since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The consequences for a deteriorating nuclear arms control regime and stability in the Middle East are already being felt. We must not let the movements for peace collapse under the weight of renewed militarism.

In searching for the answer, I find myself repeatedly coming back to the United Nations, the only place where 193 nations come together to work out, in six languages and many cultures, their global problems. The UN was started 70 years ago “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” How successful is it?

The UN’s record of accomplishments is astonishing. It delivers food to 90 million people in 80 countries, assists 38 million refugees, protects human rights through 80 treaties and declarations, deploys 120,000 personnel in 16 peace-keeping missions in addition to 13 political and peace-building missions, which are averting future genocides. The UN is responsible for aviation safety, detecting global warming, and rising literacy rates among the world’s poorest. It is charting the seas and space as the common property of humanity.

The United Nations is by far the best instrument we have to cope with the common threats the world faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When the Security Council acts in unity, it gets results: measures to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons, elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons, effective peace-keeping in the Central African Republic and other war-torn places. Global poverty, child mortality, and maternal deaths have been cut in half in the past 20 years by UN agencies.

The UN should be regarded as a central dynamic helping populations everywhere to move forward. It is saving the peace in diverse regions and lifting millions out of destitution. It is trying to prevent nuclear warfare and environmental catastrophe. It is developing everyone’s human rights. Its core message is how seven billion people can live together in a culture of

peace, which emphasizes non-violence as a starting point. It *should be* the base of our hopes for lasting peace.

But this is not how the UN is regarded. It is seen – at least in Western countries – as a bureaucratic talk shop that can't end regional wars, as a place where the big powers veto resolutions they don't like, as an assembly where states don't even pay their dues. Why do we not have confidence in the UN?

A principal answer is that the media today concentrate on the violence and terrible things happening in the world and don't report on the creative things, which would give us hope. We are inundated with the bad and seldom hear of the good. No wonder people are dispirited and cynical today. We've got to wake up and start seeing the world beyond today's headlines.

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Our hopes today are clouded because terrorism fills the headlines.

Terrorism is growing because states still resist the fundamental lesson the UN has taught for 70 years: war does not produce peace. The “War on Terror,” rashly proclaimed after 9/11, unleashed chaos in Afghanistan and Iraq and has led to the recruitment of thousands of terrorist fighters. The War on Terror has been a failure of monumental proportions. The only effective way to counter world terrorism is not through bombing but to strengthen UN international partnerships to use all the political, economic, social and legal instruments available.

Blocking the ability of terrorists to assemble, communicate, transfer money, and acquire arms has preoccupied the UN for more than a decade. When the Security Council held a summit meeting in September 2014, chaired by US President Obama, it unanimously adopted a resolution aimed

at suppressing the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters. Resolution 2178 called on states to take steps to prevent suspected terrorists from entering or transiting their territories and to share information on criminal investigations, interdictions, and prosecutions. This added to the fourteen universal legal instruments to prevent terrorist acts the UN started adopting in 1963. The Organization stepped up its anti-terrorism work following 9/11. A landmark Security Council resolution, 1540, prevents weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of terrorists.

The UN teaches that extremism and violence are spawned by tyranny, inequalities and bad governance. Few crises erupt without warning. They build up over years of human rights grievances and the denial of basic economic and social rights. Unfortunately, states are still reluctant to implement the UN's comprehensive response to terrorism. Every time a terrorist attack occurs, the first response of most governments is to call for military action. "Killing evil" becomes a mantra. Erratic political leadership panics with each new outbreak.

Those who want to uncover the reasons behind violence are accused of condoning terrorism. It is time to stop such knee-jerk one-dimension reactions. The outbreak of radical extremism reveals the deep disorder in the world, which can only be corrected by summoning up all the resources of humanity to develop legal procedures to protect the common good. That is what the United Nations does.

The response to terrorism may have to include military action, when authorized by an effectively functioning Security Council, but it must go far

beyond that to ferret out injustices in the social order. Social, economic and political exclusion are invariably the breeding grounds for terrorism.

Assisting young people to see that they can obtain a good future without violence requires the full force of economic and social programs that are still only marginally applied in areas of greatest potential conflict. Preventing the development of new bands of terrorists is more promising for humanity than dealing with barbarism when it breaks loose. Fostering inter-faith cooperation between Christians, Muslims and Jews, as the UN's Alliance of Civilizations does, raises hopes that violent religious extremism can be overcome.

Such long-range action should not be dismissed as inconsequential to the demands of the moment. Of course, existing terrorism must be met today by the rule of law. The UN upholds this. But the UN has the collective wisdom to know that the anger and alienation that produces terrorism must also be addressed. Good governance must operate on several fronts at once – policing, retribution, restoration, rehabilitation, reconciliation. That is what the UN, in its fullness, provides.

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Let me turn to something that isn't in the headlines, but is another source of hope for a more peaceful world ahead. Many here will be familiar with the UN's Millennium Development Goals, which, in 2000, set 15-year targets on aid, trade, debt relief and improved access to essential medicines and new technologies. Civil society organizations, the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and international organizations were enlisted to expand government efforts to achieve eight goals, including halving the rate

of extreme poverty and hunger, universal primary education, the empowerment of women, reduced childhood mortality, maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and environmental sustainability.

The target of reducing extreme poverty rates by half was met five years ahead of the 2015 deadline. Goals for increasing water supplies and reducing the number of slums were also met. Those were striking accomplishments.

Overall, the MDGs, showing that the international community could be mobilized, drove the human development agenda forward at a faster pace than the world had ever seen. Putting the needs of people at the centre of the agenda and improving the collaboration of various sectors of society contributed to this accomplishment. Increasingly, development partnerships have replaced “handouts.”

If confrontation on military matters still beclouds the UN’s work, collaboration in the economic and social sphere has become a hallmark of the organization. Its success in mobilizing diverse sectors in addressing universal poverty has led the UN to attempt its most ambitious project yet.

With the Millennium Development Goals set to expire in 2015, another plan was organized to take the development process to 2030. A team of 32 agency officials led by the UN Development Programme canvassed the views of thousands of people in 88 countries and even opened a *My World* website in which more than five million people cast their votes on what they wanted for their lives. A clear message came through: people want good education, better health care and more job opportunities, and they want a sense of participation and inclusion in figuring out how to build their own future.

Secretary-General Ban led this process, which may well prove to be

the hallmark of his administration. His document, “The Road to Dignity by 2030,” and its subtitle, “Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet,” reveals the scope of the new Sustainable Development Goals he has presented to world leaders.

To cope with an increasingly ageing, urbanized population expected to jump from the present seven billion to nine billion in 2050, Ban wants no less than a universal agenda for a shared future, one that is people-centered and planet-sensitive. Humankind faces the same global challenges, he says. Standards based on the principles of human rights and the rule of law, equality and sustainability must be set to ensure the global common good.

“We now know that extreme poverty can be eradicated within one more generation,” he says. “The MDGs have greatly contributed to this progress, and have taught us how governments, business, and civil society can work together to achieve transformational breakthroughs.” To synthesize the many goals and targets into digestible form, Ban has presented six themes for action:

\* **Dignity: to end poverty and fight inequalities.** No society can reach its full potential without including the voices of women, youth and minorities, indigenous people, the aged and disabled, and migrants and refugees.

\* **People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children.** Women must have access to health and financial services and live in societies with zero tolerance of violence against women and girls. The 1.8 billion youth and adolescents today are a dynamic, informed, and globally connected engine for change. Integrating their needs, rights and voices in the new agenda, will be a key to success.

\* **Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative**

**economy.** Innovation and investments in sustainable infrastructure, settlement, industrialization, small and medium enterprises, energy and technology can generate employment without harming the environment. A properly regulated, responsible and profitable private sector is critical for employment, living wages, growth, and revenues for public programs.

**\* Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children.**

A development agenda must address climate change, halt biodiversity loss, and address desertification and unsustainable land use. Sustainable management of forests, marine ecosystems, and the atmosphere is necessary.

**\* Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions.** Access to fair justice systems, accountable institutions of democratic governance, measures to combat corruption and curb illicit financial flows, and safeguards to protect personal security are integral to sustainable development. More attention must be paid to rebuilding fragile societies after crises and conflicts. Reconciliation, peace-building and state-building are critical for countries to overcome fragility and develop cohesive societies and strong institutions.

**\* Partnership: to catalyze global solidarity for sustainable development.** The sustainable development goals provide a platform for aligning private action and public policies. Transformative partnerships are built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals: placing people and planet at the centre of the agenda.

The strength of the agenda lies in the interweaving of its dimensions and its insistence that development goes far beyond the gross national product, and must include social progress, human well-being, justice, security, equality and sustainability. Ban wants urgent action “to mobilize, redirect, and unlock the transformative power of trillions of dollars of

private resources to deliver on sustainable development objectives.” Casting an eye to the future, he says, “We have only scratched the surface of ethics-driven investment by the private sector.”

Is all this too much for government and business leaders to swallow, let alone pay for? Perhaps. But the genius of the plan is to engage the *private sector* to invest in human development in the knowledge that governments will maintain political stability on the ground. Can massive human-centered economic and social development prove a bigger bulwark than constant militarism against the extremists and terrorists of the future? Will governments and corporate leaders as well as civil society activists have the vision and courage to pay the price of peace?

As Ban warns, the price of failure will be even higher than the multiple billions of dollars the Sustainable Development Goals will cost: “If the global community does not exercise national and international leadership in the service of our peoples, we risk further fragmentation, impunity and strife, endangering both the planet itself as well as a future of peace, sustainable development and respect of human rights.”

The UN is investing a lot of its political capital in the Sustainable Development Goals. The audacity of assembling such a campaign to address the common security of all on the planet should be hailed as a leap forward in defining social justice in the modern world. If, in 2030, the campaign is judged successful, the UN may well be recognized for launching the transformation of the world from a culture of war to a culture of peace.

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So there's the modern world: A mixture of the negative and the positive. Remember the old song: "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative..." We've got to open our eyes to what's really going on in the world and stop being so discouraged. The peace proposals of visionaries like Ban Ki-moon and others need strong support to overcome the economic dominance of the military-industrial complex. The institutions to guarantee peace through the rule of law will not blossom in a desert. We've got work to do.

Everyone has a role to play in building the conditions for peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is where our hope lies. We can't wait for some politician to appear and lead us to the promised land. We've got to believe in ourselves. We've got to forge the trail ourselves. We've got to reach out to one another and recognize our strengths. We've got a strong base to stand on. Let's lift up our spirits and raise our voices. Peace is ahead!



