

Hope Is How I Survive

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Your presence here signals your desire and search for sources of hope in today's chaotic world in which old alliances have been smashed, regional wars prolonged, human suffering worsened, and the very fabric of international law ripped apart by the Ukraine and Gaza wars. We have not seen such turmoil since the Second World War ended 80 years ago. The world today is deeply fractured. How can we cope?

On June 26, 1945, the Charter of the United Nations was adopted in San Francisco to maintain international peace and security, uphold international law, achieve economic and social development, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, gender, language or religion. In addition to prohibiting the use of force against a state, the Charter calls for the maintenance of international peace and security with the "least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources."

The U.N started out as a central dynamic organization helping populations everywhere to move forward. It saved the peace in diverse regions and lifted millions out of destitution. It continues to try to prevent nuclear warfare and environmental catastrophe. Its core message insists that the eight billion people on

Earth can live together in a culture of peace through nonviolence as a starting point. It is the base of our hopes for a lasting peace.

Despite its many successes during the eighty years of its existence, the U.N. today is swept aside by political leaders. No better example of the disdain for the U.N. can be seen than the recent G7 summit of the world's leading industrial countries held in Kananaskis, close to where we are meeting today. The meeting revolved around the stated intention to increase military spending to cope with the challenges to the world order presented by Russia and China.

Just prior to the meeting, the host and new prime minister of Canada, Mark Carney, suddenly boosted Canada's defence spending by \$9 billion in order to reach, before March 2026, NATO's target of 2 per cent of each member's GDP for defence. It was evident that, in doing so, Carney was trying to satisfy the gargantuan military demands of U.S. President Donald Trump who, in the meantime, has raised the military spending demand of NATO states to 5 per cent of GDP.

These artificial military spending targets are a great fraud perpetrated on the public by the military-industrial complex, which drives American policy, which, in turn, drives NATO. The annual U.S. defence budget is now approaching \$1 trillion, which is larger than the military spending of the next ten countries combined. NATO accounts for 55 per cent of the annual \$2.4 trillion the world spends on the military.

Carney justified increased military spending by saying said the world is at a "hinge moment" similar to the end of the Second World War, and the country must act in the face of new aggressions and threats to Arctic security. By championing a military response to the present chaos of the world and staying silent on the U.N.'s wide agenda for building the conditions for peace, the G7 leaders bought into the old shibboleth: "If you want peace, prepare for war." This argument is persuasive

only if you ignore what contemporary war most often produces. The Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Sudan, Ukraine and Gaza tell the story: the one thing these wars have not brought is peace.

The G7 meeting concerned itself with strengthening trade ties among the rich Western states while ignoring the desperate poverty of millions of people in the developing countries. While the leaders discussed the military route to peace from the scenic splendour of the Rockies, the U.N. was reporting that, without urgent funding, global hunger hotspots are growing and the U.N.'s refugee agency is forced to make deep cuts despite rising needs worldwide. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres attended the part of the G7 meeting he was invited to, but his voice was not heard. In fact, the U.N. today is at the weakest point in its entire existence. Not only is it shut out of the deliberations of world leaders, it is forced to slash social and environmental programs because the rich countries refuse to pay their share.

The G7 summit personified the crux of the global problem today: as the world staggers through a lawlessness worsened by the imperious President Trump, the rich minority keep piling up arms in the delusion that they can capture an elusive peace.

It is a tragic stain on the honour of the industrial countries that they fail to champion the U.N. Charter's insistence that the "least" amount of money be spent on armaments. What is most troubling about the Western rush to boost military spending — at the expense of domestic needs in the health care field, to say nothing of the deplorable low rate of foreign aid and virtual absence in the peacekeeping field — is the normalization of war thinking that is now sweeping through the Western world. Disarmament campaigns are a thing of the past. The U.N.'s "Agenda for Peace," concentrating on preventive measures to avert wars, is swept aside. The 2024 U.N. "Pact for the Future," which brought into sharp focus

the need for a recommitment to international cooperation based on respect for international law, shows little sign of being actually implemented.

Our heads are spinning trying to keep up with a barrage of madness. We need to make sense of it all. We need to find hope that the world can be straightened out, that law can again be respected, and that, here at home, Canada can play a responsible role in the recovery of a system of peace and security as promised by the United Nations Charter.

In this maelstrom, I have dared to write a chapter, “Hope in the Era of Trump,” for the revised edition of my book, *Keep Hope Alive: Essays for a War-free World*.

Where, then, can we find hope in this new world of changing alliances? First of all, I have to say this is not a matter of my presenting you with a glass of hope, as if hope were some kind of comfort food. Nor do I presume or pretend that I have all the answers to the mysteries of the origins of hope. I can only tell you how I find hope in my own life, a long one to be sure, by holding onto a vision of a world in which law and order is respected, all people have access to the goods of life, and the planet itself is protected from devastation. That is not a dream: it is the essence of the U.N. Charter, the central document of the modern world. You can see that I take a political, i.e., human, route to hope.

It is often said that hope is not a strategy to bring a just peace to the world. That may be so, but hope is an attitude towards such a strategy. Hope consists of recognizing that the world is struggling to move from the old culture of war that dominated the 20th century to a new culture of peace that has been defined but not yet achieved. We are literally transforming a world where life was once brutish, nasty and short to a life where the benefits of science, medicine, industry,

agriculture, communications, travel are felt by growing millions of people. This is the basis of a culture of peace.

A culture of peace is centred on nonviolence and reconciliation, and these are human — political — accomplishments. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Gorbachev are just some of the heroic political figures who paved the way and devoted their lives to building a culture of peace.

In humanity's long journey from a culture of war to a culture of peace, we are presently passing through a dark valley. Trump, the disruptor, dominates the daily news and we reel from each newscast. We cannot live our lives by the hourly news. We must live beyond Trump. We must stand back and look out to the horizon and hold on dearly to the anchors in our life.

Hope is a theological virtue and, for some, a faith in God's divine mercy will see them through. But hope is not dependent on spirituality; it also comes from our intellectual recognition that in a world of globalization, we can only achieve safety and security through a political process that builds on common security. I have always believed that President John F. Kennedy was right when he said, "Here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

We are not alone. We are together in one world. When we discover that, it becomes empowering, and reaching out to connect with one another releases the hope that lies buried in our hearts. Trump, no matter how authoritarian he becomes, cannot extinguish this. Nor can he block the consciences of those who aspire to a political agenda built on social justice principles.

What does this mean in practice? It means that in economic and social development, we actively support the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim for the eradication of extreme poverty and inequality. In global warming, we produce policies to effectively reduce carbon emissions and drive investment in sustainable energy to prevent catastrophic climate consequences. In arms control,

we call for the phased elimination of nuclear weapons under strict international control and for Canada to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In human rights, we demand the protection of the peoples of Ukraine and Gaza and other war-torn places, and that they be given their human rights under international law.

These positive steps towards peace are being torn apart by the re-militarization of key countries that still put their faith and money into expanded armaments rather than robust diplomacy. The answer to the problems of international security today is not more arms. The answer lies in a robust application of common security — a security in which no one is safe unless all are safe. It is hard to stand up against the torrent of militarism today, but it must be done.

Canada, which has made great contributions to peace in the past through putting resources into peacekeeping, the Landmines Treaty, the International Criminal Court and the Responsibility to Protect, needs to recover its sense of purpose in the world. That purpose is not served by more arms but rather diplomatic initiatives to foster peace rather than more war. Yes, it takes courage to stand up for peace today, but in so standing up we keep alive and strengthen the hope within us.

Let it not be said that the agenda for peace I have outlined is too much. It is the minimum to assure human security for all. It is the core of the U.N. Charter, which sets out the processes to maintain international peace and security through cooperation. The agenda for peace is the agenda for hope.

I have long ago recognized that the agenda will not be fully achieved in my lifetime. That doesn't matter. What matters is that I am fulfilling my responsibilities as a human being to work for common security and build a culture of peace. When I do this work, I am energized. I feel hope.

Along with the United Nations, I have a vision of a better, safer and more just world and this guides me. More hope is unleashed within me. I am strengthened. I am an old man, but as long as I breathe, I will not stop. Hope is how I survive.

