

## The Causes of Mass Suffering: Toward a Structural Responsibility Framework

by Sreeram Chaulia

Dr. Sreeram Chaulia is a Professor and Dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, India.

*In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business! We beg your forgiveness for those who by their decisions on the global level have created situations that lead to these tragedies.*

—Pope Francis<sup>1</sup>

### A GLOBAL STRUCTURE OF VIOLENCE

Although the 'post-post Cold War era' marked by the end of Western hegemony and the rise of multipolarity is welcome for ushering in a fairer and more democratic distribution of power in the international system, it is also represented by extremist tendencies, unabated warfare, mass displacement and human suffering.<sup>2</sup> The combination of "traditional" and "transnational" threats to security, which the American government foresaw as unique to this era around the turn of the millennium, seem to be metastasizing in the second decade of the century, producing mindnumbing brutality and human rights abuses on a global scale.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that mass violence has intensified around the world in recent years is born out by empirical evidence from various hotspots where the scale of human suffering is severe and unremedied. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the total number of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and asylum-seekers by the end of 2013 had "for the first time in the post-World War II era, exceeded 50 million people," a staggering figure that serves as a useful yardstick of contemporary large scale devastation and forced population movements occurring due to wars and political oppression.<sup>4</sup> UNHCR's head, Antonio Guterres, has sounded the warning that "peace is today dangerously in

deficit," and warned that without urgent political solutions to raging wars, "the alarming levels of conflict and mass suffering will continue."<sup>5</sup>

Maplecroft, a risk analytics company that maintains one of the most meticulously researched database of armed conflicts, reported in 2014 that "since 2011, we have identified 76 countries that have seen a significant increase in the risk in the Conflict and Political Violence Index (CPVI)."<sup>6</sup> Dr. Bruce Aylward, Assistant Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), has summarized the present perilous era of wars and other anthropogenic disasters as follows, "At no time that I can think of in the recent past have we been dealing with such a scale of human misery over such a broad geography due to such a range of hazards."<sup>7</sup> The human rights NGO, Amnesty International, has calculated that war crimes and other violations of humanitarian law were perpetrated in a whopping eighteen countries within the single calendar year of 2014.<sup>8</sup>

Protracted and bloody wars in Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ukraine, Gaza, Nigeria and Afghanistan have unleashed unspeakable human tragedies, raising fundamental questions about world disorder and the horrific symptoms and consequences it entails.<sup>9</sup> How did we come to such a sorry pass despite celebratory claims of entering a sweetspot of "the most peaceful time in our species' existence?"<sup>10</sup>

One of the temptations of appraising crisis zones and humanitarian emergencies is to isolate problems by relying on unit-level analysis of what went out of kilter in a particular country or in its interconnected neighborhood or sub-region. This micro-level ethnographic methodology of studying ongoing crises is necessary to get the context right and to propose interventions that may work in specific wars. Such an approach also appeals to country or regional specialists who focus exclusively on their cases to generate dense factual knowledge about how and why such-and-such conflict is escalating.

However, what is missing in the scholarly and journalistic literature about ongoing humanitarian and political crises is an attempt to arrive at broad generalizations as to why so many gory developments are transpiring simultaneously in different parts of the world. Systemic thinking is crucial in order to theorize the post-post Cold War period so that we can get a handle on wars and hostilities that are recurrent, concurrent and interconnected across space.

In a world where problems cross borders much quicker due to

technological breakthroughs, security and fear in disconnected corners of the planet are completely globalized. The cues that Japan's leadership drew from American inaction to come to the military aid of Ukraine as its sovereignty was shredded at the hands of the superior Russian military had a distinct impact on fueling arms races, tensions and skirmishes in East Asia.<sup>11</sup> Threats and threat perceptions, as defined by national elites, travel and feed upon each other to create a chain of insecurity in a globalized world. If a military invasion or a rebellion occurs in one part of the world, the aftereffects are experienced in not just its immediate vicinity, but also far away in unanticipated ways.

The ground zero or point of impact of direct fighting is also not necessarily the location of the masterminds and the powers that be which have a hand in stoking the flames. We need to configure a global and structural affixation of responsibility for the terrible atrocities that are happening without check. No violent crisis of today is purely local or regional. Political confrontations which endanger the lives and liberties of large masses of people should not be parochialized. It is a misnomer to label conflicts and human rights abuses occurring within sovereign territorial spaces of the fraying nation-state system as 'internal wars.'

While we feel sanguine about the decline in overt inter-state wars in the last two decades, the phenomenon of internationalization of civil wars is neither passé nor eroding greatly compared to the Cold War era of rampant proxy wars. Meredith Sarkees and Frank Wayman have used the Correlates of War data set to depict nearly 23 percent of internal wars from 1990 to 2007 as victims of international intervention. This is only 8 percent below the rate of foreign meddling in internal wars during the peak Cold War years of 1946 to 1989.<sup>12</sup> If one factored in wars lashing humanity in the last three years, it is likely that the rate of external spoilers in internal wars would go up higher than the figure for the first two post-Cold War decades. The issue of a foreign or outside hand in worsening some of the worst contemporary war theaters goes beyond academic interest and exegesis. It has repercussions from the perspective of policymaking and throws light on the nature of the global disorder that has set in.

This essay contends that a global structure of violence is operating with the connivance of great powers and their regional allies which are embedded in a networked capitalist system that is dehumanizing ordinary civilians in less fortunate corners of the world. Without gainsaying the

value of particular case studies of war-torn countries or regions, it cautions against a tendency to miss the forest for the trees and calls for a return to systemic thinking about how unit level anarchy and impunity derives its savagery from a structure of institutionalized vested interests that profit from relentless warfare and human displacement.

The essay concludes by asserting that unchecked mass murders taking place today can only be overcome by constantly exposing the ulterior agendas of states and corporations which are profiting by perpetuating violence and by patient mass mobilisation under the banner of "peace with justice" to build new global political and economic structures around principles of human decency and non-exploitation. It calls for a new politics from below based on the efficacy of social movements to fill in the vacuum created by an utter failure of elite politics from above that is driven by hypocritical great powers and war profiteering corporations.

#### PROXIMATE AND ULTIMATE CAUSES

Morally upright and courageous people troubled by the current mushrooming of insecurity and human pain have blamed international structural forces for the mess. Pope Francis' reference to certain "decisions on the global level" which create "situations that lead to [local] tragedies" is a searing reminder that something is amiss with the conduct of actors who have accumulated vast military might and wealth spanning whole continents. The former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Navi Pillay, has suggested that we are plagued by a period of global destabilization, in which calamities like the four year war in Syria are being deliberately prolonged to serve the ulterior motives of great powers. She has indicted the UN Security Council (UNSC), i.e. its top guns with the most material and ideational power, for abject failure to muster "greater responsiveness that would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives."<sup>13</sup>

Salil Shetty, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, has likewise lamented that,

*the use of veto powers has enabled the narrow vested interests of the Security Council's five permanent members to take precedence over the needs of victims of serious human rights violations and abuses. This has left the United Nations hamstrung and increasingly discredited at this critical time.<sup>14</sup>*

Shetty cites the shameful record of four vetoes exercised by China and Russia to block UNSC action on Syria that could have saved civilian lives, as well as the veto threat deployed by the US to occlude any UNSC resolution when Israel was mercilessly bombarding the Hamas-held Gaza Strip for fifty days in 2014. The redux of trigger happy resort to vetoing we are witnessing of late is reminiscent of the Cold War heydays when the UNSC was paralyzed right down the middle and stymied from fulfilling its basic function of preserving international peace.

When the international system was bipolar, the US undermined the UNSC with sixty-one vetoes, and the Soviet Union did its share of weakening global institutions with sixty-eight vetoes. These negative votes were cast in the name of “strategic interests” and protection of allies of the superpowers, resulting in exacerbation of violence and human suffering. In the immediate post-Cold War phase, there was a relative decline in the frequency with which vetoes were used by the permanent members of the UNSC. Russia, which was abjectly dependent on the US for its transition from socialism to capitalism and from authoritarianism to democracy, vetoed UNSC resolutions only twice in the entire decade of the 1990s. China, which was economically intertwined with the US and Europe, also used its veto just twice during that period.<sup>15</sup>

In those ten years, the US basked in the unipolar moment where there was no rival force trying to counterbalance it, and therefore Washington had to employ the veto on merely three occasions.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding the genocides that could not be prevented in Rwanda and erstwhile Yugoslavia, Thomas Weiss described the unity in the UNSC in the 1990s and the concomitant increase in multilateral UN-mandated peace missions as a “golden era” of humanitarian activism.<sup>17</sup>

However, in the 21st century, as China rose to great power status and Russia resurfaced as a strong military and petroleum power, both of their willingness and confidence to oppose Western political agendas globally have grown. From 2000 to 2014, China has used the veto six times already, and Russia has done so nine times. Facing a multipolar world and what some term as a “new Cold War,” the Americans have also relapsed into vetoing UNSC resolutions eleven times.<sup>18</sup>

Over and above these cases, there are also instances of crises where the UNSC does not reach the stage of voting and vetoing because the principal powers know there is no unanimity and hence no resolution is even brought

to the table. Anti-impunity campaigners like George Clooney have shown how crimes against humanity continue to be committed in Darfur and other parts of Sudan without any meaningful action by the UNSC. They accuse Russia and China, which have commercial links to Khartoum through arms sales and oil deals, of being “unwilling to apply pressure that might alter the calculations of the Khartoum government,” leaving the UNSC “too divided to respond with action.”<sup>19</sup> The manner in which permanent members of the UNSC are shielding abusive client regimes for geopolitical or economic benefit is blatant and flies in the face of the self-image of the P5 member states as upkeepers of world order.

David Miliband, the head of the International Rescue Committee, summarizes the veto recidivism and policy paralysis by calling the current juncture a “decade of disaster,” wherein “the international system is weak and divided” and international institutions are “struggling to overcome entrenched national positions.”<sup>20</sup> The sharpening of lines of tussle in global politics between Russia and China on one hand, and the US and its European allies on the other, is a central facet of the post-post-Cold War phase. With multipolarity gaining traction, deadlock and disputation around controversial issues of human rights and humanitarianism are bound to surge rather than abate in the coming years and decades.

The absence of an ethic of collective responsibility and collegiality at the pinnacle of the international system to resolve outstanding global problems, including transnational terrorism, internationalized “internal wars” and coercive population displacements within and across borders, leaves little in the way of a safety net, let alone a solution, for the victims of wars.<sup>21</sup> There is hardly any source of hope emanating from quarrelsome elites who speak on behalf of the “international community.” Liberal expectations of enhanced global governance featuring economic interdependence and multilateral cooperation on cross-border crises are being belied by what Walter Russell Mead terms as a “return of geopolitics,” wherein vicious great power “rivalries have stormed back to center stage” and “old-fashioned power plays are back in international relations.”<sup>22</sup> The law of the jungle, or the much debated structural feature of anarchy in realist theories of world politics, appears plausible when one looks at the extent of the killings and extreme violence being carried out by armed state and non-state assailants.

How exactly do realpolitik and great power jostling for spheres of influence in the backdrop of a multipolar international system cause mass

suffering in today's far-flung war zones? Benjamin Miller has theorized that, "hot wars derive from regional, rather than global systemic, factors relating to underlying problems in the state-to-nation congruence," i.e. that the source of these armed conflicts lies in dissatisfaction of certain mobilized sections of a society with their government.<sup>23</sup> However, once the seed of the conflict is sown by a tussle between state elites and these sub-nations within a country, or generally speaking due to a failure of the nation building project, Miller argues that "great-power effects are prominent either in aggravating the conflict—which is the case when great power compete in the region—or in reducing the intensity of the conflict—which happens under conditions of great power hegemony."<sup>24</sup>

The war in Syria, which has spawned nearly 3 million refugees and 7 million IDPs, and so far cost over two hundred thousand casualties, fits Miller's thesis well. It began in 2011 as a reactionary response to an Arab Spring inspired revolt of Syrian people, especially the Sunni majority community, against the dictatorial rule of President Bashar al-Assad. Very quickly, it morphed into a full-fledged, Cold War-reminiscent proxy contest pitting the US and its regional allies on one side and Russia and its regional supporters on the other. It is undeniable that the extreme religious fundamentalism and sectarian venom that has become a hallmark of the Syrian war was encouraged and sparked by rich donors connected to royal families of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, all of whom are staunch allies of the US.<sup>25</sup>

The rise of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), which has committed unimaginable atrocities against civilians in Syria and Iraq, is the outcome of external fanning and funding by American allies who are driven by animus for Iran. On the other hand, the actions committed by the Assad regime against innocent civilians owe to the heightened military assistance from Russia and Iran, which believe that the Syrian government is their bulwark against Western, Saudi, and Israeli imperialism in the Middle East.<sup>26</sup>

Some analysts paint the Syrian conflict as merely a "regional cold war," in which Iran and Saudi Arabia are the protagonists, and that it is "not America's war."<sup>27</sup> However, this is a misreading of the global alliance system of the US, of which Saudi Arabia is a key instrument in controlling the Middle East. Until the spectacular ascent of the IS, the US was quite comfortable with what Turkey, the Saudis and their allied Gulf monarchies

were doing in terms of arming and training Islamist terrorists determined to topple the Assad government.

The fact that the Barack Obama administration did not give substantial direct military assistance to the jihad in Syria (in contrast to what it did in Afghanistan in the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s) does not absolve Washington from connivance with its regional allies to keep the pot boiling. Elsewhere, I have explained how American foreign policy is culpable for making the Syrian war excruciatingly painful by giving "free rein to regional allies" and "settling down to permit a balance of terror to be sustained between Mr. Assad's military machine and the panoply of Sunni Islamist hardliners."<sup>28</sup>

A joint report on Syria by humanitarian agencies gives the UNSC an 'F' grade and categorically points out that "the violence in Syria continues to be fueled by transfers of arms, ammunition and other forms of military support from regional and international powers," including Russia, the US, France, Iran and the Gulf states.<sup>29</sup> From a systemic lens, the conjoined crises in Syria and Iraq are very much America's and Russia's wars.

In Ukraine, where German intelligence estimates that fifty thousand people have already been killed, President Obama's reported desire to avoid an "unwinnable proxy war with Russia"<sup>30</sup> has again spread confusion about great power responsibility for the spiraling violence.<sup>31</sup> Western governments and news media outlets have trained their guns entirely on Russia's thinly disguised training, arming and financing of the anti-Kiev rebel movement in eastern Ukraine, while obfuscating the systemic problem of eastward expansion of NATO and the Western military alliance's close ties to armies and elites living in Russia's shadow. John Mearsheimer asserts that, "the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis" by virtue of their geopolitical game of "attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold."<sup>32</sup> From a narrow lens, Russia is the party that is militarizing Ukraine. But in a broader vista, NATO's militarization of Eastern Europe and tit-for-tat actions by Russia are the roots of the humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine.

The war in Afghanistan—a constant manufacturer of civilian casualties, refugees and IDPs since the Soviet invasion of 1979—currently has a different dynamic from that of Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen or Ukraine. Here, the structural cause of human suffering is no longer great power confrontation via proxies (as was the cause in the 1980s), but rather a failure

of the American hegemonic regional alliance system. Unlike other warzones around the world, Russia and China are not averse to the US's military presence and operations in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. India, which is supporting civilian reconstruction of the Afghan state, is also on the same side as the US in terms of sharing the common goal of combating Islamist terrorism emanating from Afghanistan.

Despite enjoying the backing of other great powers and regional powers, Washington has not succeeded in taming the menace of the Taliban since 2001 because of the spoiler role played by the US's "major non-NATO ally" Pakistan. Carlotta Gall's investigative journalism has elaborated how the US tolerated and humored Pakistan as a loyal ally even though the latter played a double game and masterminded the insurgency of the Taliban and Al Qaeda against NATO forces and the nascent Afghan state.<sup>33</sup> Top American officials like Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton are on record that Pakistan was "really no ally at all"<sup>34</sup> and that it kept "poisonous snakes in its backyard,"<sup>35</sup> and yet the US pumped in \$28 billion worth of counter-terrorism aid to Pakistan.<sup>36</sup>

So convoluted is Washington's alliance pattern here that one need not wonder why many ordinary Afghans view the Taliban as creations of Pakistan and beneficiaries of the US. Such hearsay is not a conspiracy theory but a penetrative reading of the "misbegotten diplomatic love affair" of the US-Pakistan alliance—the key structural hurdle that has extended Afghanistan's agony and propelled a spillover of warfare across borders.<sup>37</sup> Mass wisdom on the strange collusion between the US and Pakistan also feeds on tidbits of classified information that occasionally seep out of secrecy in this cloak-and-dagger war.<sup>38</sup>

Somalia—the third largest source of refugees after Afghanistan and Syria today—has been stateless since the end of the Cold War. It is another example of great power meddling via regional allies for strategic gains that ended up compounding the problem. During the Cold War, Somalia's pivotal geopolitical location in the Horn of Africa rendered it an object of US-USSR rivalry. However, the contemporary humanitarian disaster there has nothing to do with great power rivalries. Instead, it is the outcome of manipulative intervention of the US in conjunction with its regional allies like Ethiopia and Kenya to gain greater leverage in Africa.

One must not obscure the fact that the Al-Shabaab terrorist group, which is inflicting crimes against humanity in pursuit of its aim of

overthrowing a Western-backed fledgling regime in Mogadishu, rose to fame as a respondent to a fatal US-sponsored brutal Ethiopian military invasion of Somalia in 2006–2009. Ken Menkhaus has documented how the US and its regional ally Ethiopia sought to impose their puppet warlords over an unwilling Somali society, and thereby enabled Al-Shabaab to "successfully conflate its Islamist agenda with a cocktail of Somali nationalism, anti-imperialism, anti-Ethiopianism and anti-Western sentiments to emerge as the lead insurgency."<sup>39</sup>

Jeremy Scahill summarizes the multiple ironies of Somalia's plight through the words of a guerrilla fighter as follows, "Every step taken by the US has benefited Al-Shabaab. What brought about the ICU [parent of Al-Shabaab]? It was the US-backed warlords. If Ethiopia did not invade and the US did not carry out airstrikes, Al-Shabaab would not have survived so long, because they were outnumbered by those who had positive agendas."<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, I have analysed how Africa's Western partners have used "the pretext of counter-terrorism to worsen the conditions inside Somalia by further Balkanising it and enabling Al Shabaab to go from strength to strength."<sup>41</sup>

The different types of humanitarian crises showcased in this section prove that balance of power games played by great powers, as well as hegemonic scenarios involving no clash of two or more great powers, can both engender conditions that murder, maim, punish and displace innocent civilians. The high politics of so-called guardians of international peace and security is the inflammable material that ignites the low politics of local level tussles for identity and resources.

### THE BUSINESS OF SUFFERING

Until now, I have laid the bulk of responsibility for colossal human suffering on powerful states and their disruptive neocolonial foreign policies. However, the global structure which reproduces stunning violence is incomplete if one does not examine the corporate motives and practices lurking behind criminal behavior of great powers in conflict ridden areas. We are presently living through "the highest level of arms transfers since the late Cold War," with "the world's largest arms suppliers tending to be the P5 members of the UN Security Council."<sup>42</sup>

The manner in which foreign policies of great powers have become

sales pitches for their top weapons manufacturers in conflict prone areas is well illustrated by the WikiLeaks cables in which American diplomats were found to be doing “weapons advocacy” on behalf of their top military industrial firms. An insider quoted in *Fortune* admitted matter-of-factly, “Our embassies are working hand-in-glove with the US defense industry in order to try to promote our military exports.”<sup>43</sup>

Vijay Mehta has done groundbreaking work on the inseparable linkages between military-industrial complexes of great powers, the international banking sector, and the extraction of minerals from misgoverned developing countries trapped in a conflict perpetuating pattern. He uncovers the collusion between autocratic regimes in the “Global South,” and wealthy Western democracies that supply them with arms in exchange for the transfer of raw materials to industrialized nations. Corrupt authoritarian rulers in developing countries, who empty their national coffers buying expensive weapons systems from great powers, are kleptocrats who are assisted by Wall Street, City of London, and Frankfurt bankers offering specialized “wealth management” services to launder and stash away vast sums of illegal money.

This vicious cycle multiplies local frustrations and social cleavages, culminating in “internal” or civil wars whose military balances of power are dictated by which side can field the most advanced imported weaponry from which foreign patron. In Mehta’s acute analysis, arms-for-resources arrangements made by European powers with their former colonies in Africa have a big hand in, “the creation of today’s failed and failing states.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, Miller’s concept of the lack of “state-to-nation congruence” in post-colonial countries is not an indigenous phenomenon that grows organically without any poking or abetment from global commercial forces.<sup>45</sup>

James Mittelman’s theory of “hyperconflict” is based on a similar understanding of the combined ill-effects of militarized economic globalization and neoliberalism which are giving rise to a climate of fear and human insecurity. He posits that the “old order” of the Cold War era was, “permeated by wars between states and within them, as well as partial safeguards with rules to manage them.” This has now partially been “supplanted by hyperpower [the US and its network of foreign allies and military bases] enmeshed in various conflicts” to impose excessive coercion in local sites of conflict, thereby inflaming tensions and emboldening terrorist forms of violence and resistance.<sup>46</sup>

Western neoliberal capitalism is not the only guilty party pumping the world’s faultlines with lethal weaponry. State capitalist power centers like Russia and China are playing the same game of profiting from war and destabilization of local spaces. Both of these great powers have weaponized their foreign economic policies with an eye on earning hard cash and also to win prestige and strategic influence abroad. Russian exports of weaponry are notorious for arming abusive dictatorships in countries like Algeria, Syria, Sudan, Uganda, Egypt and Myanmar, which repress their own people and in turn invite rebellions of various hues.<sup>47</sup> China has earned a reputation as the fastest growing major arms exporter in the last decade and is giving Russian competitors a run for their money not just in light weapons but in hi-tech hardware that has maximum kill rates in conflict zones.<sup>48</sup>

Beijing’s political as well as commercially motivated weapons sales in Africa have added fuel to the fire in warzones like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Somalia, Uganda, and Sudan.<sup>49</sup> With a leapfrogging 143 percent increase in arms exports between the five year period ending in 2009 and the five year period ending in 2014, China has lethal weapons clientele in as many as eighteen African countries, not to mention its geopolitical Asian lynchpin allies like Pakistan and Myanmar.<sup>50</sup> Ostensibly, each and every great power justifies its arms exporting industries in glowing terms as entities which enhance global security by countering terrorists, warlords or other nefarious threats, but these merchants of death actually lubricate the structures that routinely violate human rights and humanitarian protections of civilians caught in warfare.

The last and final component of the globally networked capitalist system that is pummeling innocent civilians is the international humanitarian system membered by donor states, aid disbursing intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are accomplices of the business of warfare and forced displacement. Earlier in this article, aid agencies and humanitarian practitioners are cited as being eager to accuse great powers, the UNSC, and corporations of complicity in impunity occurring in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. However, what has been missing is self-introspection by the lords of “complex emergencies” who frequently collude with armed actors (state as well as non-state) that oppress civilians, but who don a thinly veiled garb of neutrality and a pseudo moral high ground.

I have argued elsewhere that professionalized humanitarian

organizations, which fail to protect civilians bearing the brunt of violence in warzones, are structured by an insensitive capitalist system that permits systematic violence in the peripheries where human lives matter less than natural wealth.<sup>51</sup> The core instincts of organizational survival and self-interest, which motivate these IGOs and NGOs, have imposed an additional layer of oppression and suffering on civilians fleeing the wrath of foreign meddlers, host state armies and anti-state rebel forces. Liberal biases often act as a cover to shield these humanitarians from accountability, but their subtler on-the-ground effect of disempowering civilians on behalf of foreign powers needs to be thoroughly critiqued to reach a holistic picture of the global structural factors trampling on human dignity.<sup>52</sup>

### A NEW PEACE POLITICS FROM BELOW

The preceding sections have established that while one must pinpoint immediate causes of seemingly local or internal conflicts, the ultimate global causes should not be brushed under the carpet. Absolutely “local” wars cannot last for a long duration and cause phenomenal human suffering on a vast scale. We must therefore cast the net of responsibility for deep human suffering wider, broader, and more structurally to get to the bottom of the crises and to craft alternatives to the culture of war, destruction and abuse.

At the level of comprehension and consciousness, one must reexamine the root causes of terrorism and state repression—typical forms of violence against civilians in ongoing “internal” wars—by linking local issues and actors to global players at the summit of our highly interconnected international system.

Having framed great powers, transnational businesses, and international organizations as ultimately responsible for the incessant bloodletting in volatile regions of the world, it is incumbent upon me to conclude with ideas of overcoming this multilayered structural grid of international exploitation and domination. What is the alternative for restoring human dignity of war ravaged victims when politico-economic elites from the local to the global levels are all ranged against their welfare and settling scores at the expense of marginalized civilians? With the advent of multipolarity and its inherent feature of extra competition among great powers and transnational corporations for commanding resources and gaining spheres of influence, what is the defense mechanism for the sufferers

of wars and repression?

The answers lie in the organic resistance power of the grassroots that have been sidelined by the giants atop a global war economy. In 2008, as China began ramping up its military-industrial complex's exports to unstable parts of Africa, a watershed event occurred in Durban harbor. A shipment of arms supplied by China and headed to the authoritarian regime of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe was halted by South African workers and activists holding aloft banners reading, “Zimbabwe need peace, not China guns.” The spontaneous people's action in Durban triggered a regionwide momentum, with other southern African countries refusing to allow the Chinese vessel to dock. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a world leader in promoting a culture of peace similar to Pope Francis, remarked at that time in solidarity with the protest movement that, “if violence flares further in Zimbabwe, those supplying the weapons will be left with blood on their hands.”<sup>53</sup>

What this episode conveys is that when civil society is vigilant and organized on the basis of transnational peace, it can create a new regional consensus and strengthen unity of peoples to prevent further militarization of conflict prone areas. At the formal institutional of international legislation, global activists for peace can claim to have played a steering role, not a supplementary one, in enacting the Arms Trade Treaty of 2014, the Convention on Cluster Munitions of 2008, and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention of 1997. Douglas Roche cites these fruits of persistent struggles of the peace movement to argue that, “pressure from civil society is the best way to galvanize political and diplomatic systems.”<sup>54</sup>

It is a colossal mistake to discount the capacity of ordinary citizens motivated by values of nonviolence and human kindness (as opposed to professionalized NGOs and aid agencies that depend on donor funds and whose ethics are compromised) to come together and overthrow oppressive structures that are crushing humans in war zones. Elites in charge of militaries and treasuries often denigrate people's movements as idealistic, romantic, naive and politically unrealistic. But as Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall's classic book has documented, whole new national, regional and world orders have been carved out through consistent and active nonviolence from below.<sup>55</sup>

The key for the new order lies in lay people realizing their own agency, and seizing the initiative to demand an end to wars and forced

displacements that serve elite interests. The agenda for activism has to be wider and transcend immediate causes of mass suffering. The manner in which multiple crosscurrents of progressive politics intersected in the anti-Vietnam war era still holds lessons for the 21st century cause of peace with justice.<sup>56</sup> Just as the civil rights, women's rights, and anti-war movements made common cause in the 1960s in the Western world, we need a convergence of movements in Global North and Global South around the pole of "justice," which includes opposing a culture of war as well as its intimate cousin, the culture of commercial greed symbolized by Wall Street and its global affiliates that have oiled the machinery of violence.

Today, the communications revolution characterized by mobile telephony and web 2.0 technologies have democratized mass mobilization and empowered horizontal leadership forms far more than in the anti-Vietnam war era. Developing countries where dictatorships and wars have shredded human dignity are also undergoing a population youth bulge. During the Arab Spring of 2011, I had written that the "combination of technological and demographic change can alter history by rearranging agency among different segments of society and ushering in new orders."<sup>57</sup> Despite the bad news of peaking violence and mass displacement, there is hope in that the average person today is more efficacious and empowered to upend the structure that terrorizes her.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Father Francis, "Visit to Lampedusa. Homily of Holy Father Francis," *The Holy See*, July 8, 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130708\\_omelia-lampedusa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html).

<sup>2</sup> Chaulia, Sreeram, "Checkmating the West," *The Times of India*, March 12, 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/Checkmating-the-West/articleshow/32252157.cms>.

<sup>3</sup> Haas, Richard N., "Defining U.S. Foreign Policy in a Post-Post-Cold War World," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, April 22, 2002, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/p/rem/9632.htm>.

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